

DOCTOR WHO

THE TURING TEST



PAUL LEONARD

BBC

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The Second World War is drawing to a close. Alan Turing, the code-breaker who has been critical to the allied war effort, is called in to

break a mysterious new cypher. It's coming from Germany, and everyone assumes it is German – everyone except Turing's new friend, the Doctor. Indeed it seems the Doctor knows too much about the code, and the code-makers – and when people start to die, even Turing wonders if the Doctor is the one to blame.

Graham Greene, novelist and spymaster, has also encountered the Doctor, and thinks he's a rum enough chap, but in a remote African village he has encountered something far stranger.

To find out the truth, they must all cross the front line and travel through occupied Germany – right into the firing line of the bloodiest war in history.

What they find there has no human explanation – and only the Doctor has the answers. Or maybe they're just more questions. . .

This is another in the series of original adventures for the Eighth Doctor.

DOCTOR WHO

B B C

THE TURING TEST

PAUL LEONARD

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Imaging by Black Sheep, copyright © BBC 2000

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Mackays of Chatham Cover
printed by Belmont Press Ltd, Northampton *For Eve,*

the bad-tempered git

(or so she says)

who happens to be my lover

and my best friend

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My mother, by being there

And Eve, by dragging me out of the attic and reminding me I'm a human being.

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Book One

The Enigma

Chapter One

The first question is: Am I speaking to anyone? Can anybody hear and understand this?

It will be difficult. Beyond the microphone into which I am speaking are one thousand and thirty-seven valves, working as a perfectly synchronised circuit. This machine samples my speech five thousand times per second, and makes the sampled intensities into encoded digits by means of a continuous key. That key will repeat after seven minutes, at which time I will change the position of the circuit by hand.

But this is not enough. It's true that no one can break this type of speech cipher today, but it's also true that all codes are decipherable in principle. In time everything can be understood: it's only a matter of having a sufficiently powerful Universal Machine.

It's possible, however, that no one will ever find the tape, or that it will be destroyed, or that it will rot, or that people will simply lose interest in what happened here, at the end of the war that we all think is so important now.

If this is the case, then the next question becomes irrelevant to the problem.

Nonetheless, I will ask it.

Is it safe to tell this story?

There are several definitions of 'safe' to deal with here. First, am I endangering the security of the United Kingdom?

Well, it's possible. There are so many secrets. The ENIGMA code, that's a secret, though people know what ENIGMA is, of course, and eventually the Cabinet papers, *et cetera*, will be released, and everyone will know the full story. How the code was broken, and what that meant for the conduct of the war. But as for the rest – the events I lived through in those strange last months of the conflict – nobody except Greene knows about them, and perhaps the American, Heller, for some of it.

And the Doctor. Of course, the Doctor.

It is his story, more than any, that needs to be recorded. No – that I need to record. I must admit that, if I am to get anywhere near to the truth: I need to record this story. For myself. And the worst thing is, I don't know the beginning of it, nor the end – all I have is part of the middle. To discover the truth from small fragments like this – a snatched conversation in a public house, a tortured grimace as a city burned, a garbled explanation of noise and 3

language and other worlds – is all but impossible. It is like trying to break a code with no idea of the means of encipherment or the content of the message.

I will say now, however, that I do not think Greene was right: the Doctor is not an angel, though he may not be a man, exactly, either. I desired him as a man, loved him as one, but my love did not blind me,

nor make me religious!

Nor do I think that he was from outer space, as Heller seemed to believe in his droll American way. Not that I think that impossible – the universe is too big for that. I just think it's unnecessary, as an explanation. Superfluous.

Though that leaves open the question of what the Doctor is, and what the strangers were, and whether the thing that we burned alive that night was a man or a machine.

Is there a difference between an intelligent machine and a man? You see, it is not a theoretical question for me any more.

But I should return to the problem of safety. I do intend to be careful. I will avoid detailed discussion of the codes, *et cetera*, and I have also changed some of the names, though Greene is so famous from his literary activities that I don't think it can do any harm to mention his. In this way, I don't think anything I say will compromise national security.

However, there is a second problem of safety, concerning the Doctor himself.

Will I, by telling his story, however incomplete and speculative, be making his life unsafe? If this tape is heard and understood, people will know who he is.

Or at least that he is not quite the same as the rest of us. Then they will go after him. They will want to find out more. They will try to use him, just as they used me.

But then it occurs to me that he can read this code, too, wherever he is.

Perhaps, with his way of turning up in the right place at the right time, he will be the one to find and decode the tape. Perhaps he will even tell the government about it himself!

A thought occurs to me: could this be the purpose of my recording? Have I unconsciously decided that the Doctor himself will hear my words, naked and decoded? Is this an elaborate charade – not a telling of what needs to be told, but only a message from me to the Doctor?

But what could I possibly say to him now? Goodbye?

Yes. That's the right thing to say. If it's only for him.

Goodbye, Doctor.

It's no good. It doesn't end like that. The 'goodbye' hypothesis is disproved: Alan Turing does need to do more to put his ghosts to rest.

Perhaps I should start again. It is only fair to begin the story in some sort of order.

So, I will start with that winter day in Oxford. The day I first met you,
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Doctor (for I'm sure you are listening, somewhere, some-when). It was December 1944, a fine day, and the rooftops and lawns of the colleges were covered in a hard white frost. I was to give a lecture on Computable Numbers at St John's. I had taken the bicycle along in the guard's van, and cycled up from the station. I took a long route, past Christ Church and the Botanical Gardens, because I knew I would need the exercise after the long and rather stuffy train journey. At first my mind was full of the subject of my lecture, but gradually a magical, freewheeling sense of excitement overcame me. You will say it was all a trick of the mind, or of memory, or of the clear winter sunshine and the blue sky, but even then, in those minutes before I met the Doctor, it was as if a great adventure were beginning. The white stony paths were as straight as solved equations, the sharp winter sun-shadows crossing the lawn as sharply defined as the boundaries of sets, the toothed walls of the College and its Chapel approaching me were like huge stone gear wheels, frozen in the middle of a suddenly comprehended calculation.

I was cycling through the garden at St John's, the dark quadrangle ahead, when I saw the Doctor for the first time. He was standing in a sharp poly-gon of sunlight, just inside the quadrangle, and he was talking to a griffin.

The fanciful, anxious-looking creature was carved in relief into the stone arch above a doorway in the quad, its wings formally posed, its ears back like those of a harried cat. The Doctor had his back to me. He was wearing a green velvet jacket, and his hair was a blaze of gold. His body was perfectly poised in the sun, as if he were about to leap into flight.

But no, Mr Greene, he did not look like an angel. Nor even a fallen one.

However, he was striking enough that I felt I must dismount from my bicycle, and wheel it past him slowly, to get a better look.

‘It doesn’t talk back,’ he said ruefully as I approached, without looking round.

I glanced up at the griffin. ‘No,’ I said. Then something, an impulse of gaiety perhaps, made me add, ‘Perhaps you need to stroke it between the ears. Timothy likes that.’ Timothy is my cat.

Although the Doctor was evidently an eccentric man – who else talks to a statue? – I was nonetheless taken aback when he jumped up into the air like a circus performer and, holding on to the iron standard of a lamp, swung himself on to the narrow sill above the carving. There he teetered for a moment, arms extended flat against the wall, his shoes dislodging small pieces of debris which clattered on to the yard. He somehow found a secure foothold, then reached down and petted the stone animal between the ears, or what would have been between the ears if it hadn’t been a relief carving. ‘Hello, Timothy.

Would you care for a stick of liquorice?’

There was a brief silence, and I was struck by the puzzled, almost grief-

stricken expression that crossed the Doctor’s face when the carving made no reply. It could have been drollery, but it seemed genuine.

Then he looked down at me, and grinned, as if it *had* been a joke. ‘He still doesn’t talk! Did you say he was called Timothy?’

I decided it was time to inject some sanity into the conversation. ‘Timothy,’

I said, precisely and quietly, ‘is the name of my cat.’

‘Oh, dear. I see.’ He looked at the statue sidelong from his precarious perch, as if he thought it might after all be a cat.

‘Perhaps it could only talk in the Middle Ages,’ I suggested, trying to fit in with his mood. I was by now convinced that he was more than a little mad.

Again he gave me that puzzled and grief-stricken expression. ‘Before that,’

he said enigmatically. 'But I don't know exactly when.' He patted the griffin's head. 'Bye-bye, Timothy.' Another brilliant grin, and the Doctor jumped down, landing against my bicycle and knocking it flat, a wheel spinning. He stumbled to his knees.

'Never mind,' I said quickly, blushing, as if it were my fault, which such accidents usually are.

He looked up from his kneeling position, and I was struck by the beauty and symmetry of his face, framed by that golden hair, and again by something in his expression: how can I describe it? It was luminous, and yet somehow pleading.

Was he mad? He seemed more like a child than a man – and yet that face affected me deeply. He paid me a degree of attention that was (and here is why Greene might have thought him an angel) beyond the merely human.

His stare was curious, powerful, like a monkey with a box of tricks. One could imagine that he saw straight through the face and its illusions, into the inner processes of the brain. Indeed, at this and other times, I swear that I could feel the individual nerve cells in my head being touched, as if he were looking for something. A solution, a line of proof, perhaps, in a book full of strange theorems. It was disturbing, yet I couldn't simply label it insane, even then.

And I was still attracted to him.

I imagined myself as he must see me. My face was burning red from the cold and burnished with sweat, and my hair was probably sticking out at the back as usual. There were holes in my sports jacket, and my grey flannel trousers were shiny with age and held up by an old red tie in place of a belt.

My one concession to Oxford had been a frayed brown trilby hat, but it had kept falling off my head when I was cycling, so I had tied it to the handlebars with a piece of copper wiring I had found in my pocket.

However, the Doctor seemed as unconcerned at my dishevelled appearance as he appeared unaware of his own poise and physical beauty. He picked himself up, looked over the cycle, which was undamaged. He rescued the hat, 6

which had worked loose and landed beneath the bare pruned stalk of a rose bush.

He said, 'I am so sorry. I wasn't concentrating at all. I haven't damaged your bike, I think, but you must let me buy you a cup of tea.'

'I have to give a lecture in a few minutes,' I replied stiffly. Confused by his stare, I was now still more embarrassed. I could feel my face getting even redder, and perspiration prickled in my armpits. I was as usual surrendering to that fear of intimacy that always comes upon me: a fear that springs from the fact that, once intimate, I am too trusting, too easily controlled. The mesmeric effect of the Doctor's stare only increased my disturbance.

The Doctor looked disappointed at this rejection, and began to back away.

I knew I must act swiftly, if I wanted to see him again.

And I *wanted* to see him again.

Stuttering a little, I said, 'W-w-we could meet afterwards.'

He agreed at once, nodding vigorously and smiling. His face was shining with excitement – the childlike excitement of new friendship as it would be felt by a man who talks to griffins. But there were shadows there too. Ill-defined, uneasy shadows, the shadows of November woods. I almost regretted my hasty acceptance. He was beautiful, he was strange, but who was he? What had he seen? Why had his look affected me so deeply? I thought about hypnosis, spies, kidnapping – all the things one reads about in cheap novels.

But it wasn't entirely fanciful. In this dark time at the end of the war, anything was possible. And I was the bearer of secrets.

Nonetheless I extended a hand. 'Alan Turing, pleased to meet you.'

'You're a mathematician, aren't you?'

I blinked in surprise. The question could have been a confirmation of my worst fears – that he already knew too much about me – but instead, after a moment's thought, I was reassured, because I imagined he knew my name from my work, or from his own academic contacts. The knowledge made him seem safer, more respectable.

'Yes, I am. And you?'

'Among other things,' he said.

Again that hint of darkness, as if the ‘other things’ were not all of them the subject of innocent academic study. But then, could I say with any honesty that any of my own studies were innocent of darkness?

‘I have to go,’ I said. ‘The High Street Tea Rooms, at two?’

He tilted his face to look straight upwards. ‘The High Street?’

By way of clarification I gestured towards town. ‘The High Street.’

He followed my pointing finger and smiled broadly ‘That will be lovely!’

As I wheeled my bicycle away, I asked his name, but he just shook his head.

‘Call me the Doctor,’ he said. ‘If I knew more, you would be welcome to it.’

* * *

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It is now apparent that the telephone call from Hugh Alexander later that day was a coincidence. There were several occasions, during the subsequent events, when I imagined that it was not, and that the Doctor had deliberately shaped his story around me. However, on reflection. I don’t think this was the case. The Doctor often used the hypnotic, almost mind-reading, effect that I described above to contrive the impression that there were large forces moving within and beyond him, but most of this was a show. For all his strangeness, he was caught up in events just as much as the rest of us. He had no more control over the action than we did, and only a little more knowledge.

I’m almost sure of that.

Alexander telephoned me through the Proctor’s office at St John’s. He was an important man now – he had taken over from me at Bletchley as the *de facto* chief cryptologist, when I left to work on the speech encipherment at Hanslope Park. He was an excellent mathematician – intelligent, intuitive, consistent. He was also a good electronics engineer and an able administrator.

He deserved the job, and was certainly much better at it than I had

been. But today he sounded tired, and his voice had an edge of irritation which I could detect even in the compressed tones carried by the telephone line.

‘I’d like to invite you to tea, Alan,’ he said. ‘This afternoon.’

I started to say I had a prior engagement, but Alexander cut in, ‘With marzipan and cakes.’

These were key words, which let me know that my services were required.

This wasn’t a social invitation. I couldn’t turn it down. Alexander needed me for something.

Nonetheless I contemplated making an excuse, so that I wouldn’t have to miss tea with the Doctor, but I told myself this was stupid. Many lives depended on the code-breaking at Bletchley. An hour could be critical. I would have to forego the Doctor. I agreed to meet Alexander at three o’clock. On the way to the station, I stopped at the tearooms where we’d agreed to meet and left a message for the Doctor. I couldn’t give an address, much less a telephone number: I had to give my mother’s address.

Of course, there was no tea at Bletchley, and certainly no marzipan or cakes.

A car met me at the station, and I was rushed to a hut on the perimeter of the Park. It was flattering to be given such priority, as if I were a surgeon about to perform a critical operation, but I was melancholy. My hoped-for day off had been truncated, my strange new friend lost. I was tired of the mesh of duty in which I was caught, and wondered if I would ever escape, even when the war had ended. The sense of adventure I had felt that morning had receded, giving the whole visit to St John’s the air of a lost dream.

Inside the hut it was so cold that our breath made clouds in the air, and 8

quickly fogged up the windows. Alexander looked as tired as he’d sounded –

shadows under his eyes, and a slow distractedness to his movements which was most uncharacteristic. A man was with him, dressed casually in a sweater and grey flannel trousers. He introduced himself as Mr White, and said he was from the Military Intelligence HQ in St

Albans. Thus, straightaway, I knew that this was a very serious matter. At the time I didn't know the true identity of

'Mr White'. But I do remember being taken aback by the direct, almost angry challenge presented by his fierce blue eyes.

'The Germans are using a new code,' said Alexander, as we sat down. 'A form of speech encipherment.'

Since this was exactly what I was working on at Hanslope Park, I could see at once why he was asking for my help.

'There isn't very much being transmitted,' Alexander went on. 'But of course it could be very important.'

I didn't agree, and said so. The Germans had telephone communications throughout the territories that they occupied: why resort to complex encipherment of speech signals and then send them by radio? It was probably just a test, similar to my own tests at Hanslope Park. The content was likely to be trivial.

'Even so. . . ' began Alexander, but the Intelligence man interrupted him.

'It might be that the German High Command has at long last realised that the ENIGMA code is unsafe. If so, all the field operations based on our work are in danger. Hundreds of men are at risk. It's critical that we break this code quickly, Mr Turing.'

I thought it unlikely that the Germans had suddenly begun to doubt the effectiveness of their coding machines, when they had been so stupid about it for so long, but I went along with the explanation for the time being. If we could break the speech encipherment code, we would find out. And White was correct: there were lives at stake. I might be wrong about the content.

My logic might be in error. It wasn't worth taking the chance.

I moved back down to Bletchley the next day, leaving the work at Hanslope Park to Don Bayley. I was optimistic about my ability to help, and I was expecting to be gone for no more than a week or two. In fact, I asked one of the army girls to take care of Timothy, and left her only five shillings for his keep! Fortunately, she did not let him starve. . .

It was good to be living at Bletchley again. The little grey mansion

with all the huts in the grounds still had something of the air of a Cambridge college –

a college given temporary and very basic accommodation because of war, but a home of reason and learning nonetheless. You could discuss the theory of 9

sets with a chap you happened to meet in a corridor, and (as long as he wasn't in uniform!) you would have some hope of being understood.

However, I quickly found that the job I had come to do was going to be far more difficult than I had expected. It shouldn't have been – it was the exact reverse of the work I had been engaged on at Hanslope. That is, I had to take the coded pulses of the German messages and attempt to find a pattern that, when decoded, yielded intelligible speech. But there was a difficulty.

It had already been established that the transmission was a signal of fixed length, coming from a single location near Dresden. It was even possible that it was the same message, being sent again and again, differing only in the key used to encrypt it – which made it even more likely, in my view, that it was a test. But even if I accepted that assumption, which ought to have made the job comparatively easy, every method of decryption that I attempted led nowhere. I knew straightaway that a 'bombe' decoder would be no use –

there was far too much information. I tried using ENIGMA-like plugboards, where digits were 'switched' according to a fixed pattern. I tried varying the pattern against time, against intensity, against both, the inverse of both, the logarithm of either – it made no difference. I still produced only meaningless noise, more like the twittering of birds than human speech. One tape did seem promising – the output had a pattern – but the frequency was far too high. I tried slowing the tape down, but the result sounded very much like a startled cow.

White heard one of these playbackes when he visited to check on my progress: his hawklike expression softened, and he muttered, 'Sounds lonely, doesn't it?'

'It's just noise,' I commented. 'I haven't made any real progress with the decoding. I wonder if it was ever speech at all.'

But White shook his head. 'It's not noise. I'm certain of that. Carry on.'

I carried on, but got no closer to an answer. Within a few days I was

suffering a feeling of frustration all too familiar from the earlier years of the war: the sense of an unsolvable equation, a solution that lay somewhere just beyond numbers, maddeningly beyond my reach.

It was at this time that I received a letter from the Doctor, forwarded by my mother. He wrote:

My dear Turing –

It was good to meet you in Oxford and so kind of you to agree to meet me for tea. I'm sorry you were called away, but you were not to blame. We all know how it is in wartime, when duty calls us.

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I feel that there are things we might discuss, were we to meet again. More significant than griffins, perhaps. I had a strong sense that you were a kindred spirit. A permanent exile. Is this so?

Can you get away on the 12th? We could meet by our friend the griffin, or perhaps the Crown Public House in Bletchley would be better.

Yours in the hope of friendship –

The signature was indecipherable. Perhaps it said 'the Doctor'. Perhaps it said nothing at all.

The mention of the Crown shocked me: I had stayed there in the early days at Bletchley, and I wondered whether the Doctor knew this, and, if so, how, or whether it was just a coincidence. Again I remembered that stare, the sensation of my mind being known. I was surprised at how vividly the letter recalled that half-forgotten moment. I held the letter in sweating hands, wondering if the whole matter should be reported. What did he mean by 'a kindred spirit' and 'a permanent exile'? He could be referring to my homosexuality – I could certainly hope for this, given my appreciation of his beauty –

but again, he might be intending me to hope that.

Yet I was convinced he wasn't a spy. At this late stage in the war? And him so convincing, so essentially English? There had been no sense of evil. I couldn't believe it.

Perhaps he was from one of the British Secret Services, in which case he might be attempting to recruit me – or might be testing my loyalty. I had heard, indirectly, of instances of both. In the end I decided to

ignore the letter. If the Doctor was an innocent, and merely wished to know me, I didn't want him involved in the uncertainties and banal everyday deceptions of my work: if he was a member of anyone's secret services, even our own, then it would clearly be safer to have nothing to do with him.

So I reasoned, but reason does not always prevail. As the days passed at Bletchley, the two frustrations, that of not being able to see a way of breaking the new German code, and that of not being able to see and find out more about the Doctor, entwined and built on each other. On the damp, chilly morning of the 12th – the day that he had suggested we meet – I knew that I simply had to escape. Codes, formulae and circuits spun endlessly in my head: it was as if my brain were overloading, burning out like a tired valve.

I went to see Hugh Alexander, and told him that I needed a day off to think.

He understood, of course: he still looked as though he needed a rest himself.

I told him I would visit a friend. I didn't say who, or where, and he didn't ask.

* * *

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It was raining hard by the time I reached the village, and my trousers were soaked. The Crown seemed gloomy, rain-washed and deserted. I wasn't certain the Doctor would be there, since I had made no reply to his note. He might be waiting in Oxford. But I saw him whilst I was still outside – he was sitting by one of the leaded windows. His golden hair was illuminated, as in a Renaissance painting, except of course this was caused by the electric lights.

Once inside, I saw that he was sitting at a fussy little table with a plain cloth, and much blue-and-white china. He was reading – a shabby paperback from before the war. Perhaps it was one of Mr Greene's – given his tendency to prescience, I don't think this to be improbable.

When I spoke he looked up and smiled at me. 'Mrs Heslop found some Darjeeling tea! It's amazing – do try some.'

I sat down, took the proffered cup, though I would rather have had beer.

As he poured the tea into it, he said, quite casually, 'How are you getting on?

Have you broken the new code yet? What are the Germans saying to each other now?'

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Chapter Two

I was lost for words. I stared out of the small-paned windows of the public house at the wet tarmac, and felt a touch of panic.

'How do you know. . . ?'

'You said you were a mathematician. You said you were called away to Bletchley. Everybody knows what mathematicians do at Bletchley!'

'Everybody' most definitely did *not* know what mathematicians did at Bletchley! It had been kept a secret – even when staying at the Crown, I'd found myself asked why I hadn't been called up, and had made excuses about

'reserved professions', without being able to explain exactly what it was I did.

I looked nervously around the room, but it was quiet and empty, apart from a couple of elderly locals leaning on the bar, and Mr Heslop behind it. I knew Heslop well, but fancied he was looking in my direction, and with a certain measure of suspicion.

'Who are you?' I asked again.

The Doctor fixed me with that luminous, asking, mesmerising stare of his.

'I wish I knew.'

This wasn't good enough, and my look alone must have said so, for he quickly added, 'There's only so much I can remember, and I can't tell you a great deal of it. If you were anyone else I wouldn't tell you anything at all –

but I know you can keep a secret.' He changed modes abruptly, breaking into a broad grin. 'Would you like strawberries and cream? They're only tinned, I'm afraid. But I can pay. I have saved up my ration cards.'

I nodded, too bemused to worry about what I ate or drank, or who was paying. Surely no spy would be so open as just to sit there and ask me how my work was going? Still, his knowledge was no reason for telling him more.

‘There’s only so much I can tell you,’ I said. ‘I can tell you about my life.

About my cat. About mathematics and computable numbers, and Universal Machines. But anything else is secret. You must know that, if you know what I do.’

‘Of course.’ The Doctor seemed unconcerned by this announcement, as if he’d merely been making conversation all along – and perhaps he had. He was toying with his teacup, swirling a half-cupful of the pale fluid round and round as if it were wine. He took a deep, satisfied sniff of the resulting aroma, then glanced up at me, almost flirtatiously. ‘So, what can we talk about?’

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‘Are you really a mathematician?’

A smile. ‘What do you think?’

I smiled back. ‘There’s a problem with Hilbert’s theory of groups that has always troubled me.’

He sipped his tea. I put my question (to which I in fact knew the answer), and we discussed the problem for a while. We soon strayed into more general matters. He was very well informed about current theory, so much so that I was surprised that I hadn’t met him at Cambridge or at Princeton. He had an able and a rapid mind, and a charming way of illustrating points with movements of his hands. At times, I thought he was flirting with me, but I didn’t dare risk any kind of sexual proposition. He knew too much – about me, about mathematics. I found it hard to believe that such a beautiful and able mind could be a spy for the crude brutality of Nazism, no matter how elegant their codes, but I could not take any chance of being compromised.

The Doctor was on his second or third pot of tea, and I was halfway through a pint of beer, when he stood up and said, ‘I think I’d like to show you something.’

I stood, confused, my beer glass in my hand. ‘Where. . . ?’

‘To my room.’

I felt again that touch of panic. Until this moment, I’d had no idea that the Doctor was staying at the Crown. I was unsure now of the nature of the invitation.

Behind the bar, Mr Heslop glanced up, from the Doctor to me, and back again. He’d always considered me respectable, despite my eccentric habits and lack of obvious war service: it was clear that his opinion of me had been lowered by association with the Doctor.

I wondered what the man had been up to, how long he had been living here.

The Doctor was heading for the door to the hall and stairway. I realised that I must quickly decide whether to trust him and take the possible consequences, or simply leave.

I hesitated, then followed my new friend from the lounge bar and up the curving wooden stairs.

His room was entirely unexpected. It seemed as if he had been staying at the Crown for some time, certainly for longer than the week or so since our meeting in Oxford. Of the usual public-house furniture, only the bed remained.

The room was lined with bookshelves – every conceivable type of book was represented, and there was a substantial section on mathematics. I also noticed books on geology, astronomy, music and natural history, as well as novels and poetry. There was an indiscriminate mixture of languages, including 14

several with foreign alphabets. I wondered how many languages the Doctor spoke. A gramophone of the old wind-up type was perched on a pile of books, its brass horn polished brightly. There was a record on the turntable, part of Beethoven’s *Fidelio*.

The only gap in the bookshelves, apart from a small window, was behind the bed. Here there was a curious wardrobe, a panelled cuboid box in a dark navy blue. I wouldn’t have noticed it, amongst the more interesting things, had the Doctor not after a moment drawn my attention to it.

‘There’s something wrong with this box, Alan. I’ve had it with me for some time, and there’s a problem – a mathematical problem –’

‘How can a wardrobe have a mathematical problem?’ I asked – but the Doctor was already pulling the bed away from the wardrobe. I noticed then that, rather curiously, the wardrobe doors had been blocked shut by the bed.

Even to my impractical nature, this seemed an unnecessarily inconvenient arrangement.

‘Come on!’ The Doctor was wildly excited, sweating, radiating energy and enthusiasm. Confused, I tried to help him move the bed. It shifted too suddenly and knocked against the pile of books, sending the gramophone tumbling. The brass horn made an enormous clatter, and the record bounced off the turntable. To my dismay, it shattered on the floor.

I jumped back, stammering and blushing, for this time the accident was my fault. ‘I-I-I’m so s-s-sorry. I was – should have –’

The Doctor took no notice of me or the destruction of his record. Still radiating a manic enthusiasm, he clambered up on the wardrobe door, using the panelling for footholds, and extracted a curiously shaped key from somewhere near the top. ‘Yes! Yes! Yes!’ He jumped down, beamed at me. ‘You know, Alan, I really think this is going to work!’

I had no idea what he was talking about. It will not surprise you to know that by this time I was once again beginning to doubt the Doctor’s sanity.

While I stared, he turned to the wardrobe and opened it. He had some difficulty. The lock and the doors were clearly stiff with disuse. After the business with the bed and the gramophone, however, I did not attempt to help him.

The door finally sprang open, throwing the Doctor sprawling on the floor. I looked inside. The space there was empty, bare even of fittings such as rails and coat hangers – not a wardrobe at all, then, just an empty box. The Doctor scrambled to his feet and walked into the cupboard, looking around as if he had expected to find something else. He glanced round at me, once, with a lost, hopeless expression – Adam cast out of Paradise – then crumpled to his knees, half in and half out of the box, and started beating the floor of it with his fists and shouting. He was almost incoherent: what I could understand 15

referred to a woman having let him down. He kept pointing at the empty space, as if he had expected the woman in question to be in there. At last he ran out of voice and breath, and began to groan, his

chest heaving as if he were in physical pain. I was quite shocked by now, and shivering a little myself. The Doctor's display of emotion was as incandescent and theatrical as everything else about him: I had never seen anything like it in real life, and I was more disturbed than I wanted to be.

I went forward and put a hand on his shoulder, but the gesture was entirely inadequate. He didn't seem to feel the intended comfort, or even to notice me.

It was at this moment that there was a sharp rap at the door. 'Are you all right, Mr Turing?'

It was Mr Heslop's voice. He sounded angry, rather than concerned.

'The Doctor is having a kind of fit,' I said.

As I spoke, the Doctor began waving violently towards the door and shaking his head.

'Y-you'd better not come in,' I ventured.

It was a mistake: I should have kept my mouth shut. I've never been a quick thinker. It was obvious what Heslop thought – what he must have thought from the beginning, given the Doctor's prettiness. I expected that he had heard the story of my recent broken engagement, seen me drinking with the Doctor, and drawn his own conclusions. However, he said nothing at that moment, only grunted and made his way back down the stairs.

Five minutes later his footsteps returned and a note was passed under the door. It was addressed to 'The Doctor'. The Doctor was, by this time, curled up against the place where the blue cupboard met the displaced bed, snoring lightly. I didn't want to look too closely at his tear-stained face: it seemed an intrusion.

I started to unfold the note. If I could read the Germans' secret messages, then surely I could read this one for the Doctor.

'He's throwing me out.'

The Doctor's voice was guttural, almost rusted away from shouting.

I looked at the note, and discovered it was indeed so. Mr Heslop wanted us both to leave immediately, and was barring us from the establishment in the future. I felt angry and embarrassed, but at the

same time recognised that Heslop's concern was legitimate. He had to remain respectable, or he would lose his business. Byronic fits over empty wardrobes do not sit well with country hotels.

'He didn't like the music, either,' the Doctor said. '*Fidelio*. All broken now.'

A brief silence.

'Where will you stay?' I asked.

16

'Oh, I have other rooms.'

I doubted this was true. The Doctor looked forlorn. I remembered the words of his letter to me: 'a permanent exile'. For the second time in a few minutes I was moved more than I wanted to be, and felt that all-too-justified fear of too close an intimacy. I heard myself saying, 'You could stay with me at Bletchley Park,' knowing full well that this was impossible, or at least illegal; and that furthermore, if he were a spy, it was exactly what he wanted.

'It's all right,' he said. 'I don't have a home, but I don't need yours.' He smiled at me, all the suffering gone from his face and replaced with an insouciance that reminded me of his chat with the griffin. 'If you want to help, you can help me load the books and things into here.' He gestured at the blue box.

I frowned. It didn't seem a very practical way of carrying books. 'It will be far too heavy to lift when it's full,' I pointed out.

'That's all right, we can hire an elephant.'

I had to smile.

In fact we hired an army truck – or rather I telephoned Hugh Alexander and explained something of the situation, and he agreed to provide assistance to my new friend. Within the hour the drab olive vehicle had arrived, with a bearded NCO at the wheel and a burly Scottish soldier in the back 'to help'.

Even with this chap, the NCO and myself to carry it, the blue box with its load of books and gramophone records was almost too much for the stairs. I found myself wondering how the Doctor had ever got it up there on his own, even empty.

Heslop watched us with silent disapproval, grunting once as we almost skinned the wallpaper on the curve at the bottom. I didn't see the Doctor pay him, though I suppose he must have done so.

When we were safely on our way, crammed into the back of the truck with the precious box and its contents roped down behind us, I asked the Doctor how long he'd been staying at the Crown, but he didn't answer, just examined the dirty canvas around us as if he were a monkey looking around its new cage.

'Did it occur to you that the new code might not be German at all?' he asked suddenly.

Taken aback, I answered without thinking. 'It's coming from Germany.'

'Hmm. So everybody in Germany is a German and speaks only German?

Yes? There are no Italians, or Poles, or English POWs? Russians?' He gabbled something in a foreign language, which I think might have been Russian.

I glanced at him. He was looking at me speculatively, as if wondering whether I would take him seriously.

17

'Look,' I said, taking care with my words. 'I don't know how much you know about this, but the equipment needed to send a message of the kind I'm working on is very complicated.'

'A good point.' The Doctor frowned. 'A very good point. What does the decoded message sound like?'

'I haven't –' I began, then remembered who I was talking to and changed tack. 'I can't say any more about it, Doctor.'

He shrugged and looked away. 'Have it your own way, Turing.'

I glanced at him. He seemed deep in thought, rather than merely piqued.

'Doctor, I have to ask you how you know about this.'

He sighed. 'You didn't deny there was a new code; you were defensive about it so I guessed that you hadn't broken it yet; I assumed that you

were assuming it was German; and I wondered about that because there are so many other people around now, especially in Germany because things are falling apart quite fast over there. The rest you told me.'

I was taken aback by this rapid chain of reasoning. Reviewing it, I could see that it made sense. . . but. . .

'Why are you so interested?' I asked him. 'Our work is secret – you know that, don't you?'

'Oh, everything's secret in wartime.' He shrugged. 'In fact everything's secret most of the time. If you took any notice of "secret" you'd never talk about anything at all. I don't know why I'm interested. Because you are? I'm not a spy, if that's what you're worried about.'

I looked away, embarrassed, but was spared further conversation since at that moment the truck swung violently sideways and jounced to a halt. I heard the shout of a sentry, and realised that we had arrived at Bletchley Park. I heard the names 'Alexander' and 'Turing' shouted in reply.

I hadn't explained to Alexander that I wanted to accommodate my civilian friend and his effects for the night. I hoped I wouldn't have to. The driver had been happy enough to bring us to the Park. Now the question was whether the sentries would let us in.

They did, without question or inspection. The driver and his sidekick un-loaded the Doctor's box and heaved it into the low Nissen hut that was serving as my temporary home, squeezing it in, upright, between incomplete circuits, spare valves, and a four foot reel of one-tenth-gauge copper wire.

The Doctor stood in the doorway of the hut and looked around. He rubbed his hands and smiled, like a little boy in a toy shop. 'Oh, this is *exactly* where I need to be,' he said. 'Thank you, Alan.' Then, to my amazement, he wrapped his arms around me and gave me a hug!

Startled and confused, I pulled back, and he quickly let go. I watched him carefully. Had he intended. . . ? But no: his show of affection was over. He was 18

examining a burned-out valve, frowning at it. 'If I'm right, we'll need some more of these,' he said. 'Several dozen, I should think. If you connect them on a plugboard rig, four to a pin-ring –' He stopped, clutched his head, and stared at me, suddenly wild-eyed and

disappointed again. ‘It used to make sense,’ he said. ‘But it doesn’t any more.’

He was right: what he’d been saying didn’t make any sense. I was rather glad about that. If he had turned out to know any more than he already did then, whatever my feelings, I might have had to report him straightaway.

I went to the workshop at about 10 p.m., leaving the Doctor reading a book in a Cyrillic script. His comment – was I sure the code was German? – had led me to a new line of thought. Perhaps the ‘meaningless’ whistles and birdlike noises *were* a correct decoding of the message, as far as digital sampling was concerned – but perhaps a further analogue decoding was needed to yield intelligible human language. It would have to be some sort of fixed circuit –

I could think of several that might produce a similar effect. I decided that the best approach would be to build a few simple circuits and feed a speech in, then see which gave the best approximation of the bird whistles. Then it would be a simple matter to build an inverse circuit to decode the noises.

Some four hours later, after about ten attempts, I was ready to admit defeat. None of the amplifiers I had rigged produced a sound the least like it.

The tests had taken half the night: the room was cold, and getting colder. I was beginning to shiver, partly through exhaustion, and I couldn’t hold the soldering iron properly any more.

I listened to the tape of the original ‘decoded’ message, and decided that I had been wrong. It was too different in both timing and balance from speech.

I couldn’t, now, think of any analogue translation that would effect such a difference. Still, there was something. . . I played the tape again, at a higher volume.

That was when the Doctor screamed.

The sound was like a wild counterpoint to the noises on the tape: I didn’t recognise the voice for a moment, and jumped as if I had heard a ghost. By the time I realised who it must be and had wrestled the door open, he was gone.

I heard his footsteps running away, and ran out after him. There were

shouts in the distance: the sentries, perhaps? There was a metallic clattering sound, surely that of guns being readied, though there were no shots. I ran towards the main gate, only to be stopped by a soldier with a rifle. He stared at me a moment, then said, 'Oh – Mr Turing. Have you seen the intruder?

Bloke in a green coat.'

19

I hesitated. 'I heard someone scream, and footsteps running towards the house.' The Doctor had been running the other way, out of the compound.

It was a simple misdirection, I told myself. I was not lying. Misdirection is a standard practice when encoding information. It is not reprehensible.

'What's happening?' I asked.

'I dunno.' The young man was already turning away, uninterested in my news. Lights were coming on in the huts, doorways opening. 'Blackout!'

roared a voice. The doors started to shut again, leaving me standing, shivering, under a moonless sky. There was a cold soldering iron in my hand.

'Get that door shut!'

I heard the heavy tread of army boots approaching, and realised that the open door in question was mine, that to the workshop behind me. I quickly retreated, mumbling apologies.

Inside, the decode tape was still playing. I listened to the sounds, and wondered why the Doctor had been so afraid.

20

Chapter Three

Betrayal is a curious thing.

It begins with a sense of uncertainty: did I believe in him too much? Did I believe for the wrong reasons? Above all, did I think before I believed? For friendships, like problems in mathematics, proceed from a series of assumptions – or, to use the mathematical term, axioms.

These axioms are, in the most general sense, the basis of all our theorems about life, and therefore fundamental to the way that we see and judge others.

To take a mathematical example for a moment: when we say that two plus two equals four, we are making certain assumptions about integers, and their ability to represent concrete objects, which are not necessarily a logical part of any mathematical system. I could derive a complete system of mathematics in which two plus two equals five, or six, or 6, or zero. In fact, in my paper,

‘Computable Numbers’, I have helped to show that no mathematical system can have a ‘certain’ foundation of this sort.

Now, you might argue that it’s only common sense that two plus two equals four, but that’s because you are thinking only about the real world of concrete objects. There is another world within that world, a world of absolute logic, and it doesn’t make any ‘common’ sense at all.

Let us take a more human example – and quite a current one, if you have heard about the horrible revelations of the trials at Nuremberg. A Nazi, it appears, would take it as an axiom that Jews are subhuman, cattle to be destroyed. This, to him, would be ‘just common sense’, a certain foundation of his philosophical world, as obvious as your two plus two equals four.

The Nazi’s conversations would imply his philosophy without any anti-Semitic prejudice ever having to be openly stated. It is likely that someone whose views were quite different – myself for instance – could talk for some time to such a man, and find him quite charming, without realising that this particular axiom underlay his life. I would then suffer an unimaginable shock if he should suddenly say that all Jews should be sent to the slaughterhouse.

In a similar way my own axioms are different from those of the majority of Englishmen. My homosexuality is enough to ensure this fact – and Don Bayley amongst others has made it very clear that he holds an entirely different view about that behaviour from my own. I will not alter my belief that my condition is an unalterable and natural, if variant, behaviour: but this axiom is in direct

conflict with that held with equal certainty by others.

So, when we make friendships – as mine with Don Bayley or with the hypo-thetical Nazi – these axioms are tested. As if following the steps in a theorem backwards to the source, friends test their views of life,

reaching closer and closer to the axiomatic core as the friendship becomes more intimate. Ulti-mately the fundamental axioms – their ‘core beliefs’ – will be exposed, like rocks in the low tide, and then both parties will know all the dry harshness, the jagged edges that make them the people they are. After that, like the graphs of two equations, they will either converge or diverge, or perhaps run in parallel for all eternity, knowing everything about each other, but separate.

I have experienced all these types of friendship, at one time or another. But, uniquely, with the Doctor, our relationship was at all times on that dry, final beach. We could only talk in axioms – yet his were such that I could never know them. I could only make close guesses, subject to all kinds of error. His culture – whatever it was – was subtly different from anything human. It was impossible for my thinking to converge entirely with his, though there were times when, for a teasing moment, we seemed to be reasoning in parallel.

That conversation in the truck on the way to Bletchley Park had been the first of these.

But take the Doctor away – take away his immediate person, his responses –

and suddenly nothing he had done made sense. On the morning after he ran away from Bletchley Park, everything became subject to suspicion and error.

I knew the Doctor was not the enemy we were fighting, yet because I was confused by the shape of his mind, by the strangeness of his reactions, I was not sure of his goodness.

None of which is any excuse for what I did, which was to knock on the door of Hugh Alexander’s office at ten o’clock on the morning after the Doctor ran away, and tell him everything I knew.

I haven’t said much about Hugh Alexander until now. People may imagine a man of military bearing, given that he was in charge of the code-breaking establishment. In fact he was a chess grandmaster and a don, a bright-eyed, intelligent man with a smart jacket and a tidy desk, but nowhere ruthless except on the chessboard.

He seemed at first to be very understanding about my *faux pas*. ‘It’s not like you, Alan. But don’t worry. You were stupid, but he’s probably just a madman. I’m sure a spy wouldn’t draw attention to himself like that.’ He gave me a serious look. ‘You were lucky he

wasn't shot. Some of those Army lads have seen active service, you know.'

I nodded. In the rather stuffy warmth of Alexander's office, with the sun streaming in through the window and his headmasterly face across the desk 22

from me, it all seemed so impossible: the Doctor, the talk about the code, the scream in the night. Soon I would be back at Hanslope taking walks with Timothy and trying to make Mr Churchill's speech vanish into dits and dahs.

'I'll be – uh – more careful in future, Hugh,' I said.

He nodded, stood up, shook my hand. 'Thanks for your confidence, Alan.

We must play chess again sometime.'

'When we have the time.'

We both laughed: time was such a short commodity, then. As I left, Alexander said casually, 'Let me know if you hear from him again.'

I felt my stomach contract, for I knew I was being co-opted. But what could I do?

I suppose you could argue that the real betrayal happened when I did hear from the Doctor again.

My dear Turing –

Once again a misunderstanding appears to have come between us, and this time the fault is all mine. I don't know what affected me so much last night. I know more about this situation than you, but even so I should not have allowed my empathy to control me. I sometimes fear I'm losing all control of my feelings. I realise that it must have been very embarrassing and difficult for you.

Perhaps you would care to meet at The Griffin at eleven o'clock on the 20th? I will try to explain myself; or at least to explain something.

'The Griffin' had to mean the statue where we had first met: there was no public house, that I knew, of that name. The capital letters were a small attempt at concealment, as was the fact that the letter had been sent via my mother when he could have sent it directly. I think it was

these minor dishonesties – though they were no more than cautions, really – that led me to take the letter straight to Alexander.

What followed was inevitable. After consulting with his superiors, Alexander told me to meet the Doctor, at the statue, as arranged. I knew what would happen, of course, but I had little choice – having gone this far – other than to do as he said.

I didn't have my bicycle on this occasion: an official car carried me to the High Street and I walked the rest of the way. It was raining, a hard rain, large grey drops making pond-sized puddles on the dark stone of the quad.

The griffin dripped from its nose, its outstretched wing, its feet. The rain had 23

soaked through my shoes and the collar of my coat, and I have ever afterwards associated that damp, cold feeling and the smell of wet December earth with the soul-deep sickness of betrayal.

The Doctor was late, almost ten minutes late. When he turned up he sported a summer-gaudy umbrella in primrose yellow and white, with a maple-wood handle in the shape of a duck's head. He offered this up for my examination, without so much as a word of greeting.

'It's very fine,' I said.

I wanted to say, '*Run!*'

Because, once more in his presence, I could not believe there was anything bad about him.

Steady, I told myself. Alexander is a fair man, and will treat him as innocent until proven guilty. But the nagging doubt persisted. I knew what could happen to spies. What if a mistake was made?

'Is something wrong?'

The Doctor's voice interrupted my musings.

'Nothing's – er –' I said. 'I just wondered –'

'When the men in the white coats are going to come for me? I've often wondered that myself' His tone was light: but there was enough underlying seriousness to make me suspect he guessed the truth. He didn't need to turn that mesmeric stare on me: he had already shown

his powers of deduction, and my guilt must have been written all over my rain-slicked face.

‘I didn’t –’

I think it was the beginning of an excuse: but he interrupted me. ‘Don’t worry, I’ve been arrested more times than I can remember. Far more. You’re not the guilty one, I can hardly blame you after the way I behaved at Bletchley.

And despite my objections to the theory, I do know what ‘secret’ means in practice.’

Taken aback, I don’t think I managed a reply at all. Whatever he said, I knew that I was to blame. Blame doesn’t depend upon the degree of choice you had; nor does it depend on whether your victim suffers a severe consequence.

Blame just is: it is the act of wrongdoing. And I had done wrong.

So, when the burly Military Police (who did not wear white coats or indeed any uniform at all) stepped forward, it was I who ran, cowering like a criminal, whilst the Doctor merely said, ‘Good morning, gentlemen. Wet day for it.’

His insouciance gave me some relief: but it didn’t last, as I watched the men bundle my friend roughly to the wet ground, handcuff him and drag him on his knees to the waiting car.

Shocked to the heart, I went straight to Alexander. He must have seen my frantic state, because he poured me a stiff brandy straightaway. He didn’t 24

talk about the Doctor: instead we discussed the new German code, and my progress in breaking it, which was still none, except in the negative sense that certain approaches could now be ignored as being of no use. I wasn’t concentrating, however (the drink didn’t help), and finally Alexander said,

‘Look, Alan, we need to know everything you can tell us about this Doctor fellow. We can’t establish any background on him at all. He claims he doesn’t even remember where he was born. What have you spoken about?’

I stuttered something about privacy.

‘Don’t be bloody ridiculous, Alan! You know the situation. I don’t want you arrested as well.’

I stared at him. ‘I-i-is that possible?’

You will think I am stupid, but it simply hadn’t occurred to me.

‘More than possible. Even Tiltman wants you in the clink. And you’ve always been so discreet up until now – compared with some of the chatterboxes here. I can’t understand it.’

‘I haven’t broken any promises,’ I said, though that wasn’t true, since I had broken my promise to the Doctor (and I am breaking all my promises by making this tape, but that is another matter).

‘That’s got nothing to do with it! Alan, this isn’t a chess problem. It’s the look of a thing that matters as much as the truth. You’ve been consorting with a possible spy, you’ve brought him on to the premises, and –’

‘I’m certain he’s not a spy. And he may have something useful to contribute.’

As soon as these last words were said, I regretted saying them. But it was too late: Alexander could hardly fail to notice the implication.

‘What grounds have you got for thinking that?’ he snapped.

‘Checkmate,’ I said weakly, trying to make a joke of it.

He did laugh, but his eyes didn’t stray from mine.

‘He seemed to know a great deal about what we do here,’ I said. ‘I didn’t give anything away, but he was giving me advice nonetheless. I even found some of it useful!’ I stood up, moved to the window, uncomfortable under Alexander’s continuing stare.

‘What precisely did he say?’

And so I had to tell him, of course. He made notes. I can remember now the sound of the pen scratching on paper.

I began to feel irritated. ‘It doesn’t matter!’ I exclaimed. ‘What matters is breaking this code.’

‘I agree,’ said Alexander. ‘And curiously enough, your friend the Doctor says exactly the same thing.’

I whirled around, suddenly full of excitement and a childlike happiness.

‘He’s all right, then?’

25

‘So far,’ said Alexander. ‘It all depends what Tiltman decides to do. He may call in the Intelligence boys.’

I asked where the Doctor was, but he wouldn’t say any more.

I don’t remember what I did that afternoon. I remember soldiers laughing and swearing, some army girls making a Christmas wreath from holly. One scratched her hands, and of course she had to titter at the wounds. At another time I stood on the road just inside the gate and thought about going for a walk – but I was afraid that the sentries might have been instructed not to let me pass, and I didn’t want to test the assumption. It was raining again, and all the trees were dripping. I imagined the Doctor in a dungeon-like cell, dank and unsanitary, though I knew it would more probably be of brick, and relatively well appointed. I thought about axioms, and theorems, and differences and betrayals. I thought about the beauty of the Doctor’s form and the confusion of his mind – and of the confusion in my own. I realised, not for the first time but with more clarity than ever before, that in matters of human relations there are sometimes no reasonable solutions, no single pair of co-ordinates mapping out the answer to the problem, and that you simply have to guess and be done with it.

It was after dark when I was called to Alexander’s office again.

The intelligence officer, Mr White, was there, and also Brigadier Tiltman, the officer in charge of operations at both Bletchley and Hanslope. He was in dress uniform, as if straight from a mess party, but his expression and bearing were severe.

Alexander and Tiltman remained seated: White stood, shook my hand. His face showed a peculiar animation, the blue eyes weaving their gaze around the room almost lustfully. He was like a hawk in possession of its prey, tearing at the flesh. I found it distasteful.

‘Turing, I want to ask you three questions,’ he said.

I nodded.

‘One, do you believe the Doctor to be mad?’

I answered straightaway. 'Not in the ordinary sense.'

'Two, do you think this code can be broken by any of your methods?'

I hesitated on this one, then shook my head. 'I don't think so.'

White nodded. 'Three, do you think that the Doctor is right in his intuition that this code is uniquely important?'

I realised then that White, like myself, thought he had found something unique in the Doctor, and that he, too, could not quite let go of the mystery.

But I wasn't sure I wanted to share it: this man seemed too dark in mood. I feared the consequences for the Doctor of their working together.

26

Whilst I was lost in thought over this, Tiltman and White had a muttered conversation over Alexander's desk.

White turned back to me. 'I think I can tell you this. The Doctor's been talking about an invasion.'

'But that's impossible! The Germans are retreating –'

'On paper, yes, they can't win. But no one fights wars on paper. Take the buzz bombs: we didn't expect those. There isn't a contingency plan. They come crashing out of the blue sky and kill us, and we can't stop them. We can't know what else the Germans may have developed or be trying to develop.'

'But that doesn't make sense. An invasion would require more than –'

'I would like to take you to France,' interrupted White. 'Yourself, and the Doctor. I have the necessary authority.' He glanced at Tiltman, who simply shrugged.

Alexander, however, stood up, wide-eyed. 'Mr White! You can't do that! I don't think you can understand the importance of Mr Turing's contribution to the war effort!'

White ignored him. 'The mission won't be completely safe, Mr Turing. I know it's six months after the Liberation, but Paris is still an uncomfortable place. And it's possible that we may need to go nearer to the source of the code than that, perhaps even to the front line.'

I was cautious. Little of what White said made any sense to me, and I suspected his true reasons for the proposed mission might have nothing to do with what he was telling me.

‘Why do you need me to go anywhere?’ I asked. ‘I can do any code breaking operation from here. In fact I can’t very well do it anywhere else: the equipment and the engineers are all here. It’s far too bulky –’

‘The Doctor wants to go,’ said White. ‘And he wants you to be with him.’

And I – feel –’ Again that wild look, his blue gaze rending the air as if it were flesh. ‘I believe it to be necessary.’

After a moment’s thought – about White and the Doctor, about darkness, about betrayal and friendship and parallel lines – I believed it to be necessary too.

Before dawn the next day, I was on my way to Paris.

27

Chapter Four

We took an aeroplane – a noisy military transport, echoing, metallic and cold.

It bumped and swayed, and I was sick twice. The Doctor was excited and interested in everything, even though he was still technically under arrest and had two burly MPs with him. He seemed none the worse for his incarceration, and when I (rather weakly) asked him about it, just smiled and said, ‘Military prison food is probably as good as the Officers’ Mess rations.’ Which told me nothing. He didn’t seem to be angry with me, but his excitable, distant manner created a coolness between us that worried me – which was stupid.

I was still infatuated, I suppose. I was soon to realise that these mercurial moods were little to do with me.

We landed at a military base north of Paris at about four o’clock on the 24th.

A car was waiting to take the Doctor, White and me to a hotel in the capital itself. The Doctor greatly enjoyed the ride – it was an open-top jeep, and he sat in the back like Montgomery on a victory parade, saluting the largely empty streets of Paris. He didn’t seem to mind

when it started to rain.

I was still feeling rather sick, and was glad when we reached the Hotel du Parc, where we were to stay. It was getting dark, and the red bricks of the hotel had taken on an ochre gloss. Its windows receded, neat black rectangles in parallel lines, like a lesson in geometry made shadowy and uncertain by the falling night.

Inside, we found that the hotel had been taken over by the military, mostly Americans: young Marines hung about in the plush-and-gilt reception area, with traces of soft down on their cheeks and sidearms at their belts, the holsters heavier than the British variety, as obvious as blisters. All had a tense look: I later learned that they were a fresh unit, about to be sent to the front near Arnheim. They seemed younger than the English soldiers I knew, their flesh softer and less knowing. I imagine, given what was happening there at the time, that many of them did not survive.

We waited around in the lobby until the usual military muddle had sorted itself out. The Doctor paced up and down, occasionally making wild suggestions: at one point he suggested that the hotel should be redecorated in blue, brass and stone, with a domed ceiling, though I think he was joking because he laughed out loud afterwards.

At length our French liaison officer arrived. He turned out to be English by 29

birth: his name was Colonel Herbert Elgar, though he was no relation to the musician – the Doctor, who had apparently known the late Sir Edward Elgar, asked him straightaway. The colonel explained that he had been married to a Frenchwoman for some years, had been caught in France after the invasion and had served the Resistance. However, his appearance hardly suggested a physically active role in that organisation: he was plump and balding, with a handlebar moustache – in fact the very image of Colonel Blimp, the cartoon character from the newspaper. I wondered if he had seen the recent film, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, and was therefore a case of life imitating art, but somehow felt I couldn't ask him.

He told me how much he admired the work I had done, and that it had saved many lives – which slightly disconcerted me, because my information had always been that people at the business end of operations were not told that the codes were broken, in case they were captured and forced to reveal the information. I decided that Elgar must have been briefed only for the current mission.

As we left the lobby for the bar, he gave the Doctor a curious look, which was returned with interest, then began talking about the new German assault in the Ardennes region, which was – according to Elgar – ‘making everyone in Paris feel jittery’. There was no serious prospect of the Germans making any great advance into French territory: but the French, he said, were understandably rather nervous, having been invaded and defeated by *le Bosche* not only in this war, but twice before that in the space of a century.

One of the American Marines overheard our conversation and laughed. ‘It’ll all be over in a month or two,’ he said. ‘And nothing won’t ever be the same after that.’

‘No,’ said the Doctor. ‘It won’t.’

His tone was gloomy and peculiarly certain. White glanced at him, frowning, and seemed about to take up the discussion, but Elgar grabbed the Intelligence man and marched him towards the bar.

The Doctor nudged me. ‘That man Elgar reminds me of someone.’

‘Who?’

‘That’s the whole point – I don’t remember!’ He made it seem a joke, but his face showed traces of that pent-up frustration I’d encountered several times already.

I told him about Colonel Blimp, but he only shook his head. ‘Someone real,’

he insisted.

White and Elgar returned from the bar with drinks: we sat down and ordered food. When I looked for the Doctor, I saw that he was sitting with a couple of the Americans, playing cribbage.

30

We drank some more and awaited our food, and watched the Doctor winning the game handsomely. He then insisted his winnings be given to the poor. One of the Americans laughed, and said that soon it would all be over and there would be no more ‘poor’ – the Doctor gave him a dark look, and muttered, ‘Young, aren’t you.’ It wasn’t a question.

The soldier frowned. ‘I’m older than you are, you Limey ponce.’

‘I’m sorry,’ The Doctor said at once, shaking his head in what seemed almost clarification rather than apology. ‘I meant your species.’

The Doctor met the soldier’s angry glare with a casual turn of his head. I didn’t catch his expression, for his face was turned away from me, but the American soldier felt a sudden apparent need to refresh his glass. He got up and headed for the bar.

Not sure what to make of this exchange, and confused at the sudden mix of emotions it engendered in me, I opted for what I hoped would be a relatively safe conversational gambit. ‘Surely we can hope for a better future, with all the improvements that science can offer?’ I would have given the example of my own work, but couldn’t do so in company, and in any case it would have felt like showing off.

White only shrugged at Elgar, who clicked his finger for the waiter. I felt warm breath on my ear, and the Doctor’s voice: ‘We’ll talk later.’

All thought of the distant future went out of my mind, as I thought about the rest of the evening. It was hard to be concerned about the fate of mankind in the face of the lavish hospitality offered by the liberated French who ran the hotel. After a tremendous meal of some six or seven courses, we were offered the oldest and rarest brandies the hotel had in its cellars – and we had already drunk a great deal of wine with the meal. By the end of the evening we were all fairly drunk. White was still the pessimist, now declaiming in a loud voice that civilisation had not been saved by Theodore Roosevelt or Winston Churchill, in fact just the opposite. ‘The gloom, degradation and purgatory of the postwar era,’ he said, ‘will in time make the war seem almost an indulgence. To be honest, I don’t know how I’m going to survive it.’

In an outrageously exaggerated cockney accent, one of the Marines said,

‘What’s that, then, me ol’ mucker – the war or your hangover?’ The Americans guffawed. So did the Doctor.

For myself, having seen White’s brave new world, I know that he was, in many ways, quite right. I suppose a pessimistic and depressed character such as White’s gives a man a kind of prescience.

Elgar and White at length retired together with the remains of a bottle of brandy, ignoring the Doctor and me, who remained at the table.

The Doctor raised his eyebrows, touched the side of his nose, and

smiled. It occurred to me at that moment that it had been the Doctor who had charmed 31

the waiters into providing the special wines and brandies in such quantities, but that it had been Elgar and White who had drunk the most. I realised that the Doctor had expected as much. I was confused once more by the sharpness of his mind operating behind the innocent exterior. Confused, and perhaps a little frightened.

He said, 'You've made no progress with this code?'

I shook my head.

'Elgar says it's coming from Dresden.'

'He told you that?'

'He told White. I have very sensitive ears.' He gave me a conspiratorial wink, then shrugged. 'Anyway, they'll brief you about it tomorrow. What I need to do is get at the code. Listen to a sample or two. And I'd also like to listen again to some of your attempts at decoding, if you have them with you.'

I promise not to scream this time.'

I stared at him, unable to believe that he had made such a blatant request.

Everything around us seemed to freeze, as if time had stopped: a waiter with a silver salver bearing a small roast bird with dark purplish flesh – perhaps a pigeon or a quail – a couple of the more decorous Americans in uniform laughing with some young ladies in the doorway, the rest howling like drunken wolves at some unheard but undoubtedly insane whimsy.

I tried to think. Yes, the Doctor had White's approval to 'help' me with the decoding: but I had yet to have the terms of that approval properly explained.

In fact, nothing had yet been explained. I had been told I was to go: I had agreed, mostly because of my fascination with the Doctor: I had not, necessarily, agreed to share the most advanced kind of code-breaking intelligence with the Doctor, or anyone else. I wasn't sure about White – he seemed to me dangerously emotional and self-centred, and I had no idea of his role in Military Intelligence. Had he informed his own superiors of his actions? Elgar was no better –

bizarre, an enigma, a cartoon character with a life that didn't seem quite real. Furthermore, the Doctor's subterfuge with the others, and his contrasting openness with me, suggested that he wasn't entirely in control of himself.

'After all that has happened to you, surely you realise how important the secrecy –' I began.

'I realise that I'm in France, enjoying myself at the expense of His Majesty's Government!' Again the conspiratorial wink, but then a more serious look. 'I know I can help you, Alan. White approves. And it is serious. I don't know why.'

I realised then that it wasn't just White and Elgar that he had plied with drink.

'What do you think of Elgar?' I asked, anxious to change the subject.

32

'Elgar?

He's a pompous twit.

There may be something behind –' He

shrugged. 'There must be something else. He's a senior man. But then people get seniority in odd ways.'

I nodded ruefully 'People aren't always reasonable about power.' I was thinking of Hugh Alexander and Brigadier Tiltman, his superior. There was no doubt who was the more intelligent and better qualified, but for all Alexander's politicking, there was also no doubt who was in charge these days. The running of Bletchley Park was the worse for it.

'They can't be reasonable,' said the Doctor. 'Power isn't. It's a reflection of the inherent badness of things. If you have power, you're in control of some aspect of a world that's bad, and that means however good your intentions *you* end up being bad. At least partly.' A shadow had crossed his face. 'It's inevitable that –'

'Not necessarily,' I interrupted, eager to remove that shadow. I wanted to get into a real dialogue with the Doctor – something I still thought possible, at that stage in our friendship. 'People might be foolish, or misguided, or have the wrong information; but if you can convince them –'

The Doctor was shaking his head. 'You don't understand! You haven't met –'

He froze for a second, then flung his hands up in the air: he looked like a conductor who has given up on the music for ever and is commanding the orchestra to disband. Somehow this pitiful flamboyance failed to take the sting out of his next words: 'You haven't met anyone, Alan, or done anything, which would cause you to think otherwise. You live in a small, small world of theorems and equations and numbers and machines that break codes. You have encountered death, but you haven't encountered evil – not directly. You've avoided it deliberately, I expect.'

'And you have encountered evil?' I asked, a little piqued by this outburst.

'Does that make you a better man than I?'

'Of course I have!' He looked down at the table, now bare of all except a solitary brandy glass. 'And of course it doesn't.' He lifted it to his nose, swirling the brandy: I was reminded of his gesture in the Crown with the cup of special tea. 'It's probably made me worse,' he added, though the words were an anticlimax, as if he had felt again that lack of the information necessary to explain the immensity of his feelings.

'Have you really lost your memory?' I asked, softly, anxious to make up for the rudeness of my previous question and to restore our mood of friendly intimacy.

But it seemed that this subject was no comfort: the Doctor scowled and snapped, 'Do you think I would lie about it? What would be the point?' He drained his brandy in a gulp. 'I'm going for a walk.'

I got up to follow him. I could think of several reasons why the Doctor

might pretend to have lost his memory: to pique my interest and gain my confidence, and to avoid awkward questions. I wanted to argue this with him, but it took me a while to catch up. I pushed my way past the Marines, who were still laughing in the doorway. Young faces, soft downy half-beards.

They were no more than eighteen or nineteen years old.

'And yet they've killed men,' commented the Doctor, when we were outside and together again. He must have noted my covert

observation of the young men.

‘It doesn’t make them evil. They were doing their duty.’

He didn’t reply immediately. We walked for a while along a side street, both of us without coats and hats despite a heavy drizzle. At last he said, ‘Some duties, Alan, are so monstrous that no man can obey them and remain entirely human.’

Now, with the benefit of hindsight, I wonder if he knew what was happening in the death camps in the depths of the failing Reich. Or whether he simply guessed. Now that I know of Auschwitz and Belsen, I doubt the memory of the laughing faces of the young Marines, filled with drink and hope and fear and the prospect of a night with those pretty, flirting French girls. I wonder how many of those young jesters reached the dark horizon where duty becomes evil, and crossed it, and never noticed.

The Doctor didn’t say anything further for some time, though he kept giving me surreptitious little glances as we walked along. I worked it out after a few minutes: he was waiting for me to agree to let him have his way. To co-operate in breaking the code.

We were down by the river somewhere, the air full of drizzle and a perfume smell, when I began to give in. ‘Will White allow it? He didn’t give me any clear instructions.’

‘I don’t think he has a choice.’ The Doctor waved an arm at the sky, as if God were giving White his instructions – which indeed seemed entirely possible. ‘I wish I had one.’

I looked at him then, full in the face. I think I would have kissed him if I’d dared: instead I ‘looked the kiss’, that is, wore the expression of one who might be about to kiss. I have done it with men before: most have thought it rather odd.

I don’t think the Doctor noticed. He said, ‘I’m sorry, Alan. There’s more you deserve to know, but telling you will only make things seem more unsatisfactory.’ He looked away, across the river.

We walked a little further, saying nothing, but I knew I was going to give the Doctor what he wanted.

* * *

I began by telling him about the amplifiers, my attempts to correct the possibly decoded sounds he had heard.

‘That’s your first mistake,’ he said. ‘You have a problem with language, not with decoding. You’ve already decoded the sounds quite well, I think.’

I frowned. ‘Those weren’t human voices.’

‘No, but they were speaking a language.’

I was bewildered. ‘What kind of language?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Why did you scream then?’

‘I think I felt – sorry for them.’

I remembered what White had said, about the sounds being lonely. Both he and the Doctor, then, were concerned with the emotional content of the message. ‘But surely that’s just conjectural, in the absence of meaning.’

‘Emotion is conjecture, conjecture is emotion,’ said the Doctor.

We were in my room in the hotel, with another bottle of fine old brandy between us. The window was open behind the blackout curtains, letting the chilly dampness of the night creep in. I was cold, but didn’t feel like shutting it. The Doctor was comfortable. He was sprawled on the floor with his hands behind his head and his eyes closed.

‘It could be one of several languages,’ he said, after the silence had gone on for some minutes. ‘But I don’t know it, and can’t translate it. All I can do is tell you it’s a language.’

‘You know that from the structure?’

He opened his eyes and nodded. There was a glimmer of respect on his face. The effect this had on me was tremendous: I hadn’t felt so pleased and excited since Chris Morton had smiled at my enthusiasm for numbers, fifteen years before.

‘Language has structure,’ said the Doctor, half to himself. ‘A complex structure. On the other hand so does noise, in a strictly harmonic sense. But only one has *meaning*. That is, only one has meaning to *us*, I

mean.’ He blinked. ‘If you see what I mean. So the question becomes,’ he added before I had time to become confused, ‘not whether there is noise in the structure of meaning, which I happen to believe is actually true, and of which, come to think of it, this explanation is actually as fine an example as I remember hearing, not that I remember hearing many, you understand; but whether there is *meaning* in the structure of *noise*, because that will be the determining factor upon which we decide whether your coded transmission can be assumed to have a meaning intended to be comprehensible to someone like you, or even us. Of course,’ he added without stopping for breath, ‘success or failure depends on the degree to which you can separate the structure that describes whatever meaning the message has from any other structural noise which may or may 35

not accidentally or deliberately be buried in the code. Coffee?’ He added with perfectly equal weight. ‘Or cocoa?’

I thought hard for a moment. ‘You said, “Comprehensible to someone like me.”’ I thought for a moment and then added, ‘All language is intended for human ears, surely.’

‘Tell that to crickets.’

‘You’re not suggesting an animal sent this transmission?’ I was beginning to feel as if I needed to scream. Perhaps it was the alcohol.

‘Animal? I doubt it.’

‘Well then – *who*?’ If my recollection is clear, I did actually shout.

From his position on his back on the carpet, the Doctor looked up at the ceiling. ‘In a universe of thirty billion billion billion stars,’ he said, pointing at the architrave, ‘it could be almost anyone.’ He rolled over on his side, like a man in pain. ‘Maybe even the crickets.’ He peered sideways at the shadows lurking between the bed and the wall. ‘What do you think, Jiminy?’

It occurred to me that we were both very drunk: I wondered if he was going to be sick. I started looking around for a towel or a bucket. Whilst I was doing so the Doctor got up, but only to look out of the window at the black, starless, cloud-filled sky. An aircraft droned overhead, perhaps more than one, perhaps on their way to bomb Germany. It occurred to me we were in breach of the blackout.

I decided it was time to bring the discussion, at least, down to earth. ‘There are other explanations,’ I said. ‘It could be a false language

designed by the Germans to act as another layer of encoding. Perhaps they have a machine to voice it.'

'That's possible,' conceded the Doctor. 'We could work with that approach.'

But how would you decide the meaning of an entirely arbitrary language? It's the same problem. They might as well be from another world.'

'No,' I said patiently. 'They're from Germany. We know a lot about the way they think and the things they're going to say.' This was how we'd broken the ENIGMA code, in essence: guessing at key words that were likely to appear, such as 'general' or 'battleship', and trying various combinations until we got one right. But I didn't tell the Doctor that.

'Yes!' The Doctor whirled round and grabbed my arms: for a terrible, wonderful moment I thought he was going to hug me again. 'Yes yes yes! That's it!'

There are only a few basic messages – we could take a numerical approach. I could work on the Syntactic Principle –'

I hadn't heard of this, and said so. The Doctor didn't choose to explain. He started to cast around the room, like a hungry cat searching for its supper.

The effect was comical, and I was drunk enough to start giggling.

'Where's the playback machine for the code?'

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I laughed outright. 'It's the size of a large chest of drawers, Doctor. There was no way we could move it from Bletchley. I explained all that to White but he insisted we had to come here –'

He glared at me. 'They should have brought it! It's important!'

'It's equally "important",' I giggled, 'that we're not both put in prison for treason against the Crown. I should have a talk with White before we do any more talking about the code.'

'Hmm.'

'Doctor, we're both drunk and there's no real urgency about this. It

can wait until morning.'

'I'm not drunk. I'm never –'

'Tell me, have you any family? A wife?'

He extended a hand a few inches above his face and examined the fingers closely. 'I don't see a wedding ring,' he said. 'I might have taken it off, though.'

'Be serious!'

He looked at me. 'Do you often feel the lack of a partner in life?'

It seemed an odd word to use, 'partner', as if we were discussing a business relationship rather than one that involved the messy business of sex and the hard duty of raising children.

'I – well, hmm. No, not really. I was going to get married, but it wouldn't have worked. I'm probably better off alone.'

The Doctor sat up abruptly. 'Yes, well, that's my view too. Now, can you remember the numbers or will you have to go through the decoded messages again first?'

I looked at him then, and knew something had been lost. He was looking straight past me. He had, quite deliberately, closed the door on the more intimate sort of friendship that normally comes about between two people, after a period of time: he was letting me know that our relationship would be limited to – what was that strange, cold term he had used? A partnership –

yes, that was it. A business partnership.

I thought then that there were many things that the Doctor did not understand – that in some ways he did not truly connect with the human world. In retrospect, it occurs to me that, in addition to this, he was trying to be kind.

The grey, aching years since VE Day have taught me too much about the separation of business and pleasure, in fact, about the separation of all parts of our lives into little fissured compartments. Only that way is there any happiness for the truly adult man: secured away from the pain of real life, hidden in the backstreets of Manchester –

I'm sorry. I mustn't let my present predicament weigh down this story.

I was younger then, and still believed in the possibility of a whole happiness, a home-and-two-children life that could not be divided. Even the debacle with 37

my fiancée, Joan, had not taught me the futility of believing that a man such as myself was entitled to that happiness.

So, though I was disappointed at the Doctor's rejection of my offer of emotional intimacy, I didn't let it spoil the evening: I remember we stood arm in arm on the iron balcony, both of us quite drunk, and in breach of the blackout (which was not strictly enforced in Paris – the French apparently thought their capital city led a charmed life). I remember, too, the light from our window catching the face of a man in a doorway on the street two floors below. I recognised the features, despite the dim, long-shadowed light, as those of Mr White.

He shrank back, and I wondered if he was spying on us, though it seemed a silly enough thing to do from the damp street when he could have listened from the corridor outside, or perhaps even concealed a microphone in the room. But I quickly enough saw the real reason for his watch, in the profiled face of a sharp-featured and rather pretty woman, with a tall hat of the sort fashionable in my mother's day, and coiffured black hair. She was half turned away, cowering against the wall.

'Don't worry!' White's voice. 'They won't say anything!'

But the woman scuttled away out of the light, her heels clicking on the pavement.

I noticed that the Doctor was staring, following her movement even though he couldn't see her any more. At the corner, a flicker of light showed her grey coat, moving.

He stared after her long after she had gone. In the street below, White had vanished.

'What is it?' I asked the Doctor.

He didn't speak. He looked shocked, afraid, rather as he had sounded after hearing the partly decoded message in Bletchley. He didn't scream, but his knuckles were bloodless as they gripped the black iron railing.

'It? I don't know. I hoped it had gone away,' he muttered after a while. 'But it will never leave me. Never.'

‘What won’t?’ I asked, confused: it wasn’t clear what ‘it’ he was talking about. When he didn’t reply, I asked, ‘Did you know that woman?’

‘No,’ he said. ‘I didn’t. Not yet. But we will, Alan, we will.’

38

Chapter Five

Let me tell you how I destroyed mathematics.

I wrote one major paper before the war – it took me over a year, and was called ‘Computable Numbers’. In this paper I described my now-famous (or infamous) Universal Machine, the ‘computer’ which can, by reading and writing from a paper tape, perform any mathematical operation as a series of simple steps. That concept has since found practical application – with valves and wire replacing much of the paper, for the sake of speed and efficiency –

but it was not an essential part of the point I was making, more a way of demonstrating it.

The paper was an attempt to overturn David Hilbert’s contention that ‘all problems are solvable’. What I needed to show was that there are problems that can’t be solved at all, however much time or information you have. To do this I needed, first, to show that the process of solving a problem within any logical mathematical system could be reduced to a finite series of simple, mechanical steps, and, second, to show that there were results that could not be found using these steps, no matter how they were applied. Exactly how I did this was a complex process, requiring many pages of reasoned argument, but in the end the result stood, and continues to stand. In essence, by using reasoned steps I had proved that the process of using reasoned steps will not solve all problems. This is not the same thing as saying that there are some things ‘beyond’ reason, and especially it doesn’t mean that anything that feels comforting, regardless of whether or not it can be proven, must be true – that way lies madness. Nonetheless I had established that mathematics contains undecidable problems, and therefore cannot solve all problems.

The only other way I know of getting the answer is guessing, and I think this is what the Doctor did to break what we later came to call the Dresden Code.

We spent three days in that Paris hotel. French soldiers brought sheaves of paper thick with numbers each morning, and the Doctor

and I studied them, looking for patterns. The Doctor talked a good deal, of syntax, of codes, of

‘number plans’. I followed very little of it, and yet I was sure that at some level much of it made sense: for the first time in my life I began to have some idea of how an ordinary person might feel when I talked of the higher realms of mathematics. Sometimes I had the sense that whole new fields of endeavour, 39

as radical as the calculus, or the theory of sets, was being implied by what he said – at others, he seemed to be talking the purest nonsense.

But he got the answers.

At first they were only the vaguest concepts, outlines of meaning, but then the Doctor made a breakthrough. I’m still not sure how he did it, but in the centre of the message itself he found a translation table, containing German words and the sounds of the ‘artificial’ language, both of course translated into lengthy numerical codes. This made it possible to turn some of the ‘words’ in the rest of the message into German, without having to understand the sounds at all.

From this point my experience with ENIGMA became useful. In the early days, many messages had been decoded because we knew roughly what they said: things like meteorological reports, for example, contain certain words in certain positions, and it was easy enough to run a decoding machine through all the possibilities until the answers made sense. Here, we could do it without recourse to a machine, because the table was quite small: only one hundred and forty-five words carried ‘translations’ in the code. Because of the method of encoding – as discrete particles of sounds – the ‘translations’ were very long, but their patterns were easy enough to find. Within a few hours we had decoded all that part of the message that had German translation.

There was quite a lot of it that we couldn’t decipher: the entire first minute was untranslated. But then came a part that was reasonably clear.

THE EXILES. . .

RESUME THEIR STATUS ACCORDING TO PROCE-

DURE [MEANINGLESS WORD/S]. REJOIN FROM DRESDEN. TWO

[MEANINGLESS WORD/S] TO REMOVE.

UNCERTAIN LOCATION.

USE LOCAL [MEANINGLESS WORD/S]. WAR AND SOLDIERS. MANY WEAPONS. DISTRUST AVAILABLE.

I felt a sense of triumph, if anything more intense than when the ENIGMA code had first been broken, even though I wasn't more than ten per cent responsible for the work. I think I was proud of the Doctor – of his mind, which was clearly extraordinary. It was a curious thing, almost a relief, to discover that I had at last met someone cleverer than myself.

‘We’ll have to go there.’

That was the Doctor’s immediate verdict, and he stuck to it in the face of my bemusement, White’s outraged stare and Elgar’s hearty laughter.

‘Look – er – Doctor,’ said Elgar, when he had recovered. ‘I understand something about operating behind the lines, you know, and it’s not a good idea.’

40

Not for you. What we need you for is to break as much of the code as possible, so that anybody who does go behind the lines will be as well-briefed as possible. Mr Turing, you understand this, surely?’

I glanced at the Doctor. I could see a level of emotion building in his face that might lead to another Byronic fit such as that which had got us thrown out of the Crown. I didn’t know what effect it might have on White: I doubted it would impress Elgar. If I didn’t do something to stop the performance, we might both end up back at Bletchley, having achieved nothing we couldn’t have done by staying there.

I didn’t want to go back.

I said, ‘I understand that the Doctor and I can’t just go to Dresden. But I know why the Doctor needs to go.’

‘And why is that?’ Elgar’s question was unexpectedly sharp, and White’s blue hawk eyes were searching my face.

Of course, I had no idea why the Doctor wanted to go. I merely wanted to calm him down by giving him a chance to elaborate.

‘Doctor, you’d better explain to them,’ I said.

The Doctor appealed to White. ‘You’ve talked about affinities. You’ve released me from custody – twice – on the strength of an “affinity” between us.’

I saw Elgar shake his head, but he said nothing.

‘Now believe me when I say that I have an affinity with the makers of this message. I can’t say what it is. There’s something that they have that I haven’t met in – in a long time. I want to see them.’

White seemed about to say something, but Elgar got in first. ‘These seem to me like selfish reasons, Doctor.’ His bluff Colonel Blimp manner had entirely disappeared: his voice was cold, distant, judgemental. Even White seemed a little surprised.

‘I can find out their secrets!’ promised the Doctor. ‘Who they are, where they’re going, whether they will affect the course of the war!’

‘Can you really?’ Elgar again: the question sharp, biting.

‘Steady on,’ said White. ‘The Doctor may be on to something. You can’t just assume he’s raving – he’s broken their code, after all. He may well have something –’

‘He can’t go to Dresden, White, and that’s final.’ Elgar looked as if he’d like to say more, but didn’t want to say it in front of the Doctor and me.

The Doctor spoke up again. ‘I need to go. Please. I need to see them.’ His gaze was impassioned, his eyes watery, almost spilling tears.

But Elgar was unmoved. ‘No, no, and no,’ he said, fierce, but almost smiling now, as if the Doctor’s ridiculous insistence had become a joke.

41

This put-down had the effect of ending the interview quickly, and without a fit of madness from my friend. But I could see that the Doctor’s emotions were still running high. As soon as the door had closed behind us, I suggested that we go out and get drunk.

By the end of our second bottle of wine, the Doctor had worked his way through anger, disgust, maudlinity and wild talk of impossible

schemes to travel to Dresden on our own. At last his mood settled and he seemed ready to tell me why meeting this group of dissident Germans, refugee Jews or escaped prisoners of war was so important to him.

‘Well, first of all, they’re none of those,’ he said, referring to the above three categories, which I had just mentioned. ‘People like that wouldn’t have the resources or the need to make up a whole new language and a complicated radio code to escape.’

‘Admittedly it’s overcomplex,’ I said, ‘but people often do things in an over-complicated way. Mathematical proofs, for instance, often contain more lines than are strictly needed to show –’

‘How many times do I have to tell you, Alan? This isn’t mathematics! This is real life, with real people suffering!’ He banged his fist on the table at the end of each sentence, making both bottle and glasses vibrate.

I wondered how excited he might get, whether he might get us thrown out once more. As calmly as I could, I said, ‘I realise that, Doctor. I think that “real suffering” is all the more reason why they might do something that you and I, sitting at this rather cosy table in this rather warm cafe on the right side of the lines, might regard as too complicated. They may be frightened – confused –

they may not even know that the war’s as good as over –’

‘Oh, I think most people know that.’ The Doctor met my eyes and gave a curious half-smile, and I realised then that he was quite consciously using an old trick of conversation – arguing with everything I said to keep me away from the subject I most wanted to discuss.

I half smiled back. ‘Come on, Doctor, you can tell me. Who do you think these people are, and why do you think you know them?’

‘Not just them. The woman too. And – I don’t know. I really don’t know. It’s something I feel, but don’t remember. Can you understand that?’

I was puzzled, and my face must have shown it, because he reached out and grabbed my hand.

‘It’s like – walking into a room full of people, say the dining room at the hotel, and you know – just *know* – that you’re familiar with some of the people there. You can’t put a name to them, but you can

recognise them, and you can see that they can recognise you. You played a game together, once, and you can still feel the rules of that game, though you can't remember ever playing 42

it, or what the results were. And you know it was the best game you ever played, the most exciting, the most exhilarating, and at the same time the most frightening, but you don't want to play it again, not with these people, not now, because –' He turned away. The waitress was pulling long, rattling blackout curtains along the wide windows of the cafe. I glanced at my watch and saw that it was late afternoon: the day almost gone.

'Because?' I prompted after a while.

The Doctor only shrugged, whispered, 'I can't remember.'

I offered him more wine. He picked up the glass, sniffed at it, swirled it vigorously, sniffed some more, though it was only the most ordinary *vin rouge*. He looked up at last, with a gleam of merriment in his eye, and the clouds on his face quite lifted.

'I'm sorry, Alan, this must be getting very boring for you. My entire conversation must seem to consist of "I don't know" and "I've forgotten". Let me tell you something I *can* remember!' He swigged back the glass of wine as if it were water, then went on. 'I tried to join the RAF, you know. In 1940, when they needed all the pilots they could get. Whatever Mr Churchill said, I could see – I *knew* – how desperate the situation was. And I knew I could pilot an aircraft with very little training. But they wouldn't let me do it.'

'Why not?' It struck me that the Doctor was possibly too old: he looked older than I was – perhaps forty – and whilst I didn't know what RAF policy was on pilots I suspected that anyone over thirty-five would not normally be considered.

'I didn't have any nationality papers. I couldn't prove I was a British subject.'

'And are you?'

He shrugged. I frowned: despite all he had said, I hadn't until that moment realised his loss of memory was so complete, but the lost expression on his face, the slight nod to my raised eyebrows, told me it was so.

'I'm sorry. That must have been very distressing.'

He didn't say anything.

'It probably makes you all the more glad to be able to serve now.'

He shook his head. 'You don't understand. I've always had a role – a function to perform. Only twice in the last fifty years have I felt the way I should feel –'

He stopped, took a startled intake of breath and stared transfixed. It was almost as if he had been physically trapped in some clear, fast-setting liquid, like an insect cast in amber. The effect was so alarming that I thought, at the very least, that someone must have walked in. I looked over my shoulder –

but saw only the almost empty cafe, the bar girl standing with folded arms over the counter, probably waiting for us to go.

'What's the matter?' I asked.

43

He leaned forward and whispered, 'I've just remembered something.'

Then, without warning, he got up and left, banging the door behind him.

I would have followed, but I had to pay for our drinks first: besides, I didn't expect him to go far. But, by the time I got outside, I looked up and down the quiet street and could see no trace of him.

I searched for the Doctor for a while, then the light began to fade so I made my way back towards the hotel. There was another café on the way, with some tables outside despite the chilly season. At one of the tables sat Colonel Elgar, with his back to me, and the woman who had been with White last night – at least, I was reasonably sure. Surely no two people could have that same coiffure, that same sharp profile.

She didn't recognise me, and Elgar didn't see me. I was stepping up towards him – I did not imagine that there was anything unusual about the situation and was all ready to say 'hello' – when I heard Elgar ask, 'How much does he know about the Doctor?'

I froze, and very quickly turned away, shuffling through the doorway to the interior of the café. I was lucky, in that there was no window: I could stand here, with the door ajar, and there was little chance that Elgar would see me, yet I could hear them both fairly clearly. It did

not occur to me until afterwards that I was spying.

‘Well – Greene is completely persuaded that he’s good.’ The woman spoke with a strange accent: middle-European, perhaps, but with an odd overtone I hadn’t heard before. In addition, there was something unusual about the voice itself: it was pinched, constrained, as if she were an actress ‘doing’ an accent – and doing it badly – rather than speaking in her natural voice. The words themselves meant little to me: I didn’t know who Greene was at this point.

The conversation that followed, when Elgar pressed for details, was very strange.

‘He isn’t from here,’ she said. ‘It’s possible that he thinks he is, but he isn’t. That’s obvious. I should see him for myself – I could come to the hotel, perhaps?’

‘You’re the only first-generation we’ve got.’

A slightly petulant note entered her voice. ‘This is precisely why I need to see him myself.’

‘And if he’s – what you think he is?’

‘I don’t know what I think he is. Yet.’

I could have been listening to the Doctor. I had a strange, lurching sensation in my brain, as if I had entered a children’s game, an Alice-in-Wonderland world where the rules of life had changed to a sort of nonsense, and everyone 44

had lost their memory and replaced it with a series of giant playing cards, the meaning of most of which they had forgotten. I would not have been surprised to see a giant white rabbit hopping through the misty twilight outside.

‘Very well,’ said Elgar to the woman. ‘Come to the hotel the day after tomorrow.’

She stood up then, and for a moment I saw something that wasn’t quite a woman, more like an image of a woman, an Art Deco swirl of half-metallic colour, a face, a coiffure.

I think that was the first time that I realised – if only for a moment – that something entirely beyond my reasoning was involved in this problem, something I would never quite grasp or understand. Even the

shock of her next words couldn't drive away the otherworldliness of the moment.

She said, 'Remember, though, my curiosity is of secondary importance. If you think for a moment that he will be able to prevent the execution of our mission, he should be destroyed.'

45

Chapter Six

Elgar left a couple of minutes after the woman, and I went back to the hotel, confused and rather afraid. Elgar was clearly a traitor. White, too, had been involved with the woman, though I suspected that White's involvement had been no more than an assignation of a romantic nature. Still, there was the possibility that both of them were in on it. But what was 'it'? The woman hadn't seemed German, and it was surely inconceivable that any non-German would choose to work for the Nazis at this late stage in the war, when they were so evidently the losing side. It occurred to me that the French Resistance might be running this operation, trying to get some advantage over the British, now that they were free of the Germans: but I hardly thought they would kill for it, as the woman had suggested. So who? The Russians? The Doctor had spoken Russian once, hadn't he?

I found White in the bar, drinking with a couple of American officers in long coats and whisky smiles. I attracted his attention, and with some difficulty convinced him that I needed to talk to him urgently ('Nothing's urgent, Alan') and in private ('If it's secret, I don't understand it, and if it isn't, these chaps don't mind hearing').

In his room, he did make some attempt to sober up, by splashing cold water from the sink across his face. He asked me again why I needed to see him.

'I – I – need to know about the woman.'

White raised his eyebrows. 'And I didn't think you were the type!'

I wasn't sure if he was joking, so I plunged on. 'The woman you were with last night. I don't mean to pry, but –'

White laughed. 'You're not prying. She's just a tart, Alan. High-class, but a tart. Not your type, I shouldn't think.'

I managed a smile. 'I wasn't asking for a recommendation!' I took a

breath, looked at the wall behind White's head, which was decorated with pale stripy wallpaper. There were no lights on in the room, because the curtains were still open, but it was almost dark.

'Well then?'

'I think she's a spy.'

'Why?'

I told him about the meeting in the cafe with Elgar. 'I don't know who she's working for,' I concluded, 'But she's up to something.'

47

White was rubbing his lip. He was, suddenly, a great deal more sober. 'So is Elgar, by the sound of it. Unless he's playing a double game.' He stood up, paced to the darkening window, and stood there in silhouette. He looked almost as strange as the mysterious woman at that moment, and rather more predatory. 'And she's not a tart. It's much more complicated and real than that. I was trying to fob you off. Sorry.'

There didn't seem to be any need for him to apologise, in the circumstances – at least, not to me – and I said so.

'Who's Greene?' I added.

He jumped, visibly, like a bird startled by a sudden noise. I could almost hear the susurrus of feathers. But when he spoke his voice had the catch of laughter. 'Oh, he's the third man. There's White, and Elgar, and Greene's the third man. You never get to see him, because he's not part of the real world.'

I laughed too, but felt a chill suspicion. He wasn't going to tell me who Greene was – what else wasn't he telling me? Was everyone in on this? How could I find out? I felt as if I were living at the heart of one of those insoluble problems that I had proved to exist, a maze of suspicions and possibilities and half truths in which no information stood on the solid ground of reality and where any door might open to reveal – well, anything. I'd had enough of Paris: I wanted to go back to the security of Bletchley Park and the unimaginative but reliable Brigadier Tiltman, and just *hide*.

'Don't worry,' said White, as if he sensed my unease. 'Lots of these half-baked spy types make threats about killing people. Hardly any of

them will do it. Killing requires a lot of effort, and leaves a mess behind to clear up. If it was the Germans we were dealing with, I'd be worried, but it's probably the French, or, God help us, the Bulgarians. I'll have to get in touch with London and sort it out. Thanks for the tip, old chap.'

His manner was quite different now, convinced and practical, but I suspected he was just good at sounding that way when he needed to. I left, having given up all my information, and without even having established to my satisfaction that even Mr White of Military Intelligence was on our side.

I found the Doctor in his room, with the light on and the curtains shut. He was reading – a novel by Graham Greene, entitled *The Power and the Glory*.

He looked relaxed, his earlier agitation forgotten.

'Your life may be in danger,' I said.

He didn't even raise his eyes from the book! 'Oh, it always is. Who is it this time?'

'The woman we saw last night?'

Now the Doctor did look up, and for the second time I told the story of the meeting in the cafe. The Doctor listened with more attention than White had, 48

and seemed to appreciate the strangeness of the thing more readily.

'Did you see the woman's skin?' he asked.

'I saw her face.'

'No, no, that was probably made up. Did you see her hands?'

I thought about it. 'No, she wore gloves. And a long skirt, with high boots.'

The Doctor nodded. I wondered whether I should say anything else – about the otherworldliness of the woman – but the Doctor spoke first, questioning me closely about what Elgar had said. He found one particular sentence interesting – it had meant nothing to me – 'You're the only first-generation we've got.' We both agreed that the use of words was subtly odd. 'First-generation'

could mean – by analogy – one of those people in a spy or field organisation nearest the top, or with most experience, but it didn't sound exactly right for either.

'It sounds like one of those ambiguous words in the coded message,' I said.

We stared at each other.

He grinned. 'A word for which there's no exact translation! Yes!'

'So the woman's working for the people who sent the message?' I asked, but realised it was a silly question as soon as I finished speaking. We had no way of telling. She could just as well be working for their enemies.

The Doctor just shrugged, and returned to his book. 'Next step – wait and see,' he advised.

In the morning Elgar called us to a meeting in his office. It was a rather bizarre sight, because he was using what must have been the hotel's honeymoon suite. Pastel cupids and insect-like nymphets adorned the walls, and there were a couple of paintings showing mildly erotic scenes in the style of the pre-Raphaelites. The carpet was plush, the bed circular and draped with pink satin. In stark contrast a metal trestle table stood next to the window, with a French Army girl clattering away at a chunky typewriter. Elgar dismissed her before addressing us.

He was, as usual, in full dress uniform, swagger stick and all. White was there: he gave me a cautioning glance, presumably to remind me not to mention last night's conversation – as if I were likely to!

'I gather you two have broken the code,' began Elgar.

'Partially,' I said. 'We can only be sure of the meanings of the words translated into German as part of the transmission.'

'Seems uncommonly careless, that. Why do you think they've included a translation table?'

I had to admit I hadn't thought about this. I glanced at the Doctor.

'Probably because the recipients don't speak German,' he said. 'And they'll need to, as part of their response to the message.'

‘That’s a good enough reason on the face of it,’ said White. ‘But to me it makes no sense. Why couldn’t they use a dictionary? And how many words are there in the translation table?’

The Doctor and I answered together, like Tweedledum and Tweedledee:

‘One hundred and forty-five.’

‘Well, the recipients were hardly likely to be able to converse in German with a vocabulary of that size.’

These seemed good points to me, but Elgar just shook his head. ‘I think the Doctor is right. The recipients don’t speak German. The rest of the table may be reaching them in another message.’

He used the word ‘may’, but he spoke as if he knew it for certain. The Doctor and I exchanged a glance.

‘Now, the main item on the agenda is this: we need to get a reply to them.’

He stood up, and walked to a blackboard which he had set up, incongruous in the plush suite. He glared at the Doctor and me in turn, like a company commander in a film giving out battle tactics. ‘We need to tell them that help is on its way, and will arrive on the thirteenth of February 1945.’

‘I expect that it will need a confirming code word, which we haven’t got,’

said the Doctor. ‘Also, I can’t be sure that a message encrypted by this system will be what they’re expecting.’

‘It will have to do,’ said Elgar briskly. Again I had the suspicion that he knew more than he was letting on.

I glanced at the Doctor again, half expecting him to complain further, but he merely nodded and said, ‘Very well, sir.’ It was the only time I ever heard the Doctor ‘sir’ anyone – which was how I knew damn well he didn’t mean it.

As soon as we were back in my room I asked the Doctor what he was doing.

‘Going along with him, of course,’ he snapped. ‘He knows more than we do at the moment. But don’t worry, I intend to change that. At least we know he’s not on the same side as the senders of the message. The next thing is working out which side is which, and what they’re doing.’ He was pulling all the accumulated paper of the last few days out of drawers and trunks and filing boxes, scanning the endless lists of numbers as if looking for some specific item. I asked if I could help, but he brushed me aside.

‘Doctor, I am worried,’ I had to admit after a few minutes. ‘As you say, I have no idea whose side we’re meant to be on, why we’re doing this, or whether we can trust any of the people we’re working with.’

The Doctor looked up and met my gaze with his. There was a quietude in his blue eyes, a degree of simple friendliness in his expression that I had already come to realise was quite rare for him.

‘Alan Turing,’ he said, ‘welcome to the real world.’

50

A moment later, he found whatever it was that he was looking for, and we began to compose the message. Or rather the Doctor did, scribbling long lists of numbers on blank foolscap sheets. It was all I could do to keep them in order as he wrote.

I guessed straightaway that he’d been lying about not having the code word: but now I was becoming puzzled. Elgar’s message, and his decision to send it, had clear implications.

‘Elgar’s setting a trap for them, isn’t he?’ I asked.

‘Probably,’ said the Doctor, without stopping his scribbling.

‘Do we want to let him get away with that? Just to find out more?’

‘I don’t know. Maybe.’

‘Don’t you think we should check Elgar’s credentials first?’

‘White’s doing that.’

I asked a few more questions on similar lines, but the Doctor only grunted in response. Eventually I told him I was going to see White.

He looked up, his eyes clear. ‘Very well. You do that.’

I found the Intelligence man in his room, on the telephone, his voice raised and a little strained. He looked oddly pale, as if he had received a visceral shock, or even a personal bereavement.

‘I see,’ he said. ‘Yes, of course I understand why –’

Words from the other end of the line, then White said, ‘Goodbye,’ and hung up.

For a full minute, he didn’t seem to see me.

Eventually he met my eye. ‘Mankind has no future,’ he said, in a dead voice.

‘None whatsoever.’

51

Chapter Seven

I waited for White to explain, but he didn’t. I decided perhaps the information was classified: a new type of weapon, perhaps. But it was difficult to envisage any single weapon with enough power to destroy the world. As a man with a good knowledge of science and mathematics, living only months before Hiroshima, I’d guess you might think it strange that I didn’t think of the A-bomb, but such possibilities were only theory at the time. No one in the general scientific world had any idea of how close the theory had come to practical fulfilment, and many thought it wasn’t possible. But there were, as you might expect, many confused rumours of secret weapons – the V-1

and V-2 had been falling on London and southeast England since September 1944, and there were many who thought a third such weapon, with far more devastating capacity, was due to begin operations any day.

With thoughts of this kind going through my head, and White’s cadaverous expression before me, it’s hardly surprising that I almost forgot about the message – my reason for seeing White. When he asked me why I was there, I stuttered a little, then explained my doubts about ‘going along with Elgar’.

He looked at me, his face so angry that for a moment I thought he might shout, or even try to hit me. I flinched. But all he said was, ‘No, Elgar’s right.’

‘These people have to be caught.’ A pause, whilst he lit a cigarette. ‘Not that it will do any good.’

It was no use. I had to know. ‘Who are they?’

‘I can’t tell you.’ But I could see that he wanted to do so. I played the Doctor’s trick, and remained silent.

Suddenly he jumped up, grabbed his hat, and left the room, leaving his cigarette burning in the large brass ashtray on his desk. Seconds later he returned.

‘Hello. Mr Turing?’

I frowned at him.

He extended a hand. ‘Graham Greene, novelist and journalist. And definitely not a bloody spy.’ He picked up the cigarette from the ashtray and began smoking it.

‘Ah,’ I said. I remembered the book that the Doctor had been reading. I doubted it was a coincidence. Trust him to have worked it out. I was beginning to wonder how I’d been so stupid: though I personally didn’t care for his 53

books, Graham Greene was well known then, and I’d seen his photograph in the press. But then a photograph isn’t the man.

‘Would you care for a drink?’ Greene asked. ‘The bar’s still open. I’ve always been interested in your work.’

‘Ahm – yes,’ I said, wondering how much further into the slimy pit of in-trigue I was about to fall.

Greene – formerly ‘White’ – got up and walked to the bar, almost too quickly for me to follow.

‘How sober are you?’ he asked, over our first drink. His gaze wandered around the bar, fixing on a pretty woman who was sitting on her own. He examined her fiercely, making it so obvious that she looked away, embarrassed.

‘I’m fairly sober,’ I said.

‘And careful, from what I gather. Until our persuasive friend came along.’

I nodded. 'There's no point in being otherwise.'

'Hmm. I think it's all an act. You're careful because you want to be a good little boy.'

'I do it because I have to,' I said, somewhat stuffily.

'That comes to the same thing. Good little boys do things because they have to. Men do things because they want to.'

I was getting quite angry with Greene by now. I had an impulse to reply, along the lines of, 'Spoilt, arrogant little boys do things because they want to, they don't give a damn how anyone else feels. Grown men do things because they have to, right or wrong, out of a sense of duty (however misplaced) or justice or honour or love.' I had the words all ready. But I couldn't quite get them out of my mouth. Greene was the second person who had referred to my thought processes as immature since I'd come to Paris. Perhaps it was France, I decided: perhaps maturity was measured differently on this side of the Channel. I wondered whether Greene's ocular flirtation with the woman at the bar was considered to be maturity. I wouldn't treat a man in that way, even if I'd thought I could get away with it.

'The trouble is, you have no experience,' Greene was saying. 'You're confused and frightened and you want to go home.'

My face must have shown that this was the truth, because Greene laughed.

'Well, I don't, and I don't think you should. I enjoy this – this is the truth.

Deception. Muckery. It's life, Alan.'

Which was what the Doctor had said – 'welcome to the real world' – but it hadn't been the same. Coming from him it had sounded like a genuine welcome: from Greene it sounded like a warning, posted at the gates of Hell itself. I began to feel less angry at his insults, and more sorry for him.

'But –' He glanced at the girl, who had just been joined by a chunky blond Marine. He shrugged, looked back at me, his face suddenly savage with anger.

‘There aren’t any limits to it, Alan,’ he said. ‘I thought there’d be some limits –

that just out of sheer self-interest the killing would stop somewhere – but you only have to look at history.’

His pain was real, but the melodrama he was putting on top of it irritated me. It wasn’t necessary ‘What are you talking about?’ I asked him.

‘Jews,’ he said. He lowered his voice. ‘The Germans are systematically killing millions of Jews. Not thousands: millions. They’re shipping them to camps on trains and gassing them. They want to kill all the Jews in Europe before the war is over.’

It was stomach-turning news, though not a total surprise – there had been rumours.

Before I could recover enough to comment, Greene went on: ‘The people we’re trying to catch are on the run from these death camps. We think they’re guards – trying to get away before the Russians get to them, or we do. They will know where the camps are, where the Jews are being taken. We need to get to them, interrogate them – if we can find out where these death camps are we can bomb them. Or bomb the supply lines, perhaps.’ He looked at the ground. ‘Not that it will do any good. The stain on the soul of man is there, and it will never go away.’

I tried to relate this information to the content of the message the Doctor and I had decoded, and failed.

Greene was drifting away: ‘Conrad was right. “The horror, the horror. . .”

You know, I never thought it was that bad.’

I decided it was time to bring him back from the field of literary horror to the oft-mentioned real world. ‘Where are they going?’

Greene looked at me with ill-concealed distaste. ‘They’re trying to get away to South America, we think. The middlemen might be Arabs or Italians.’

I stared at him, trying to take it all in. ‘And the message? Where does that come in?’

‘We’re not sure. There’s quite a lot more of it – we need that decoded too.

But Elgar doesn’t want to use the Doctor. Can you do it on your own?’

‘No,’ I said simply.

‘You’re not saying that just to keep him in a job?’

‘Hardly,’ I said. ‘And why is Elgar suddenly so suspicious? What about the business with the woman in the café – can we trust him at all? I’d rather trust the Doctor, if I had the choice.’

Greene gave me an odd look. ‘You would,’ he said, with an emphasis on the ‘you’. ‘I don’t trust either of them, but not for the reasons you think.’ He looked around the bar, and I was reminded of the Doctor looking around his 55

room on the night we had arrived in Paris. But the curiosity was fiercer, the gaze that of a trapped animal. ‘Fallen angels,’ he muttered.

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘Oh, you don’t understand anything,’ he said impatiently.

I was a bit tired of being told this by people who were unwilling to explain anything to me. ‘Try telling me more about it, then,’ I suggested.

But Greene just sat there sulkily and ordered another drink – one for me as well, though I hadn’t finished the first.

‘We have to be logical about this,’ I said. ‘The enormity of the crime being committed by the Nazis doesn’t mean that the senders of the message are necessarily guards at these camps. Why would they choose such a complicated means of communicating with their rescuers? And there’s nothing in the message which suggests they’re Nazis. In fact –’

I had to stop then: Greene was staring at me, his face screwed up with such terrible anger that I couldn’t go on speaking.

‘You really don’t grasp the truth, do you? I’ve just told you that tens of thousands of Jews are being gassed every week and you’re presenting me with a problem in logic. You don’t bloody care, do you? You’re just not a proper human being, Alan. You don’t have the right

responses.'

I was startled and rather frightened by this attack. I have heard psycho-logists talk of 'redirecting anger' and I think this must have been what Greene was doing, since I had done nothing to offend him, except disagree on a point of logic. I decided not to argue: it was pointless in this situation. I wanted to walk out, but I still needed some answers from Greene about the message the Doctor was sending.

'What proof do we have that they are these killers?'

'Elgar's sources,' said Greene. 'German underground. There is one, you know. I can't say more – don't know more, actually.'

'And the woman who wanted to kill the Doctor?'

'They thought he was a German agent. We've straightened them out on that.'

I thought about it. Logically, it fitted. But I was unhappy about it. The strangeness of that interview in the café – surely it wasn't all explained so simply.

I needed to talk to the Doctor. To get rid of Greene, I said, 'Yes, I suppose that makes sense.'

'You suppose? The Great Logical Mind, and you just suppose? It makes sense, Alan. It's what you're here to do.'

I stood up. 'I'll get on with it, then.'

'You do that.' Greene turned to his drink. I began to walk away. 'Oh, and Alan –'

56

I looked back.

'I hope you learn to be a human being some time.'

I walked away, quite angry with him. He seemed to think that, because I could think logically about what I had told him, I had no heart. Even if it had been true, it wouldn't have made me worthy of his contempt – and it wasn't true: the story of the deaths of the Jews had shaken me up. As I left the bar, I found myself looking at the young woman Greene had been looking at earlier.

She had straight black hair and a blue dress, and was quite beautiful – almost as beautiful as her companion, the chunky blond Marine. I remember them sitting on their stools, godlike in their youth, their faces turned to each other with that radiance of young lust.

Yet I could see the skeletons beneath their clothes.

When I got back to the room, the Doctor handed me a sheaf of papers covered with scribbled numbers.

‘All done,’ he said. ‘Tell them to send it tonight.’

‘I ought to check it over first,’ I said, ‘merely as a formality.’

I meant exactly that, but the Doctor gave me a sharp glance and I knew immediately that he had done something – altered the message in some way, added a warning, perhaps.

I said nothing, merely repeated what Greene had told me about the death camps and the escaping guards.

The Doctor looked solemn. ‘I agree, what’s happening is appalling beyond human measure. But your first instinct was right – these people are nothing to do with it. I don’t know why Greene thinks they are. Is it Elgar?’

I didn’t say anything, unsure as to whether I should reveal intelligence information.

‘It is Elgar, then,’ said the Doctor, sparing me the need for any prevarication.

‘Why doesn’t that surprise me?’ He looked up at me. ‘It’s nonsense, Man.

Plausible and emotive nonsense – the best sort. But it’s not true. There’s something else going on, and I know it, and Elgar knows it too. It’s nothing to do with the Jews.’

I looked down at my shoes, rather scuffed and dirty brown as usual against the handsome plush of the hotel carpet. I was thinking. For all that I didn’t like Greene, he was an official of the British government; so was Elgar. The Doctor had told me he wasn’t even a British national. We were fighting a war, and terrible things were happening. Could I allow my irrational – emotional –

trust for the Doctor to override my loyalty and duty to my country?

I'm not saying I thought he was a German agent. I would never have thought that. I just wasn't sure that it was so simple any more – the Doctor, eccentric memory-less genius code-breaker, against the rest of the world, 57

slower and less imaginative. Maybe he was simply wrong. As I have learned to my cost, being clever about some things doesn't make you right about everything all the time.

'Let me check this code,' I muttered.

And he knew, of course. He knew that I didn't trust him any more.

The message was far longer than the one that Elgar had asked the Doctor to send. I had no way of telling what the additional material meant – the words were untranslatable using the table we had – but it had a structure that was familiar from other indecipherable material in the original message. I couldn't believe it was just an identifying code word – it was too long, too complex.

Now I faced a real dilemma. I paced the room, muttering to myself, and quickly worked out that I had three choices.

First, I could report the Doctor to Greene and Elgar. It was certainly what I should do – it was clear that he was behaving in an underhand way, using his unique skills to subvert Elgar's intentions. But Elgar's confederate had threatened to kill the Doctor, and, for all Greene's pooh-poohing of that idea, I couldn't entirely forget the possibility.

My second choice was to go to the Doctor, and ask him straight out what he was doing. But I wasn't sure I trusted *him* either, not any more.

My third choice was to try to decode the Doctor's additional message. This was likely to be difficult – I didn't know how he'd encoded it, since he could have no direct knowledge of the 'language' being used by the code makers –

but it was a reasonable assumption that he was guessing at meanings from the gaps in the codes, working on some syllabic pattern from the translation table. If he'd encoded it, I had a chance of breaking that code. I at least knew something of his methods.

This seemed the easiest option, the least thorny, the least likely to end

in a misery of conflict and betrayal. It depended only on myself and my own intellect. So I went ahead with it.

Whilst I thus avoided any human conflict, someone died.

It was already light when it happened – I had been working all night at the decoding, without much success.

I felt the floor shudder, and heard the screams at once – incredibly high-pitched, more like a stuck pig than a human being. I heard a Frenchman shouting. An alarm bell began to ring.

I have to say I panicked for a moment. My first concern was not my own safety, but that of the precious code sheets. If there was a fire, they would be destroyed. I gathered them up from the desk where I was working, and the various piles on the floor, and all the while the screams went on, louder and 58

louder. Then something crashed against the wall with enough force to make the room shake.

Outside I could hear the Doctor shouting, ‘Help me with the door! For pity’s sake, someone help me!’

I dropped the papers and ran outside. There was a smell of burning in the passage. The screams were louder, more hideous, quite inhuman. They were coming from the gold-and-white-painted door of the honeymoon suite.

‘Elgar!’ I shouted.

The Doctor was tugging at the door, but it wouldn’t budge. I joined him, but it was no use.

‘It’s locked from the inside,’ I said.

An American voice spoke from behind us. ‘Stand back, sir.’

It was the young Marine who had been with the girl in the bar earlier. He had a pistol in his hand.

The Doctor and I shuffled aside. The Marine put the pistol near the lock and fired once. Splinters flew. He pulled at the door, but it still wouldn’t open.

He flung himself against the recalcitrant wood, shouting, ‘Damn! Damn!’

Damn!’ It bowed and shuddered, but didn’t give way.

‘The window!’ shouted the Doctor. ‘We can get in through the window!’

He made his way to my door, presumably to get to my window and thus to that of Elgar’s office, but he couldn’t get in there because I had locked it, because of the code sheets. The Marine was taking another pot shot at the lock. I started to fumble in my pockets for my keys, but in my panic couldn’t find them. If it hadn’t been for the terrible screams, the scene would have been funny.

Then, quite suddenly, the screaming stopped. There was an enormous sigh-ing sound, like a gust of wind in a very big tree, and the door fell open in-wards.

‘Look out!’ the Doctor shouted, rather unnecessarily, since we all flung ourselves to the floor. Air rushed past us, into the room, not out of it.

I looked up as soon as I dared, and saw the Doctor advancing into the room.

‘Be careful, sir,’ called the Marine. ‘It’s gonna be hot in there.’

The Doctor took no notice. The inside of the room was a curious sight: it was whited out, as if it had been snowing inside. I could hear the Doctor’s shoes crunching, as if on snow. There was a smell of smoke, but no thick clouds of it. The walls were bare brick, with only charred remnants of the decorations, but only a slight warmth emanated from the doorway.

Cautiously, I followed the Doctor.

‘Excuse me, sir.’ The Marine. ‘I feel we should seal off this room right now, and it might be safer if we evacuate the hotel. If you could both leave now –’

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I was ready to object, and was certainly expecting the Doctor to do so, but he turned round and said, ‘Sorry, yes, I’ve seen all I need to see.’

There was a peculiar aspect to his face. His expression was very strange, almost hunted, as if he had just come face to face with a fearsome guilt. I don’t think the Marine noticed, preoccupied as he was with organising the evacuation.

After a moment I realised that it wasn't just the Doctor's expression that was strange: there was a white ring of ash around his lips, like the face paint of a clown. It looked as if he had been kissing the fire.

It was then that I put together three facts. One, the Doctor had been the first on the scene, though he was three doors away and I was next door. Two, he was fully dressed, though it was very early and he had no reason to have been up all night. Three, he had gone into the room first, and he had done something that had got the ash on to his face.

Something that could have involved concealing the evidence.

The woman had told Elgar he may have to kill the Doctor. It occurred to me now that the Doctor may have decided to do the killing first. The thought made me feel sick, but logic compelled me to accept that it was possible.

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Chapter Eight

It was my fault. I lost the Doctor.

It was because I insisted on going back into my room for the precious code sheets, over the objections of the officious Marine. The code seemed even more important now, with my increasing doubts regarding the Doctor. And the evacuation was silly, really: there was obviously no fire any more, and no real danger. We all stood around outside for about half an hour – some of us wrapped in dressing gowns or even blankets – until the Americans decided to let us back in. I looked around for the Doctor outside, but couldn't see him.

Carrying the code documents as I was, I didn't want to risk wandering around.

When they let us back in, I discovered that I had been moved: the entire floor where the fire had occurred was closed off. Someone had transferred my clothes and typewriter to an attic room, with a long view of Paris streets and rooftops. The room was cold and small but adequate for me – I've never been that fussy about creature comforts. Not knowing what else to do, I resumed my work on the Doctor's message, trying to make sense of his additions.

At about eleven o'clock there was a knock on my door. To my astonishment, it was Colonel Elgar.

‘I thought you were dead!’

‘So did a lot of people,’ said Elgar briskly. ‘Fortunately, I was out. But one of my colleagues is a casualty – and a woman, too. I believe we both know who is likely to be responsible.’

Despite my own doubts, I felt compelled to defend the Doctor. ‘I don’t think so. The Doctor is a man of peace.’

‘Oh, come on, now. No one’s a “man of peace” in the middle of a war.

Anyway your personal feelings are neither here nor there. I’ve come to give you your orders – if you see the Doctor, I want you to turn him in. And don’t try to do it yourself – he’s dangerous. Report his location. We’ll do the rest.’

I wondered what ‘the rest’ was. From Elgar’s expression it seemed unlikely that it would involve much opportunity for the Doctor to put his side of the case. I thought of the dead Jews, the horror on White’s – Greene’s – face, and imagined a summary shooting in a dark alley.

‘But he wasn’t responsible,’ I protested.

My sense of horror must have shown in my voice: Elgar looked up sharply.

‘For what?’ he asked.

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‘The Jews – White has told me your theory. I don’t believe it. I don’t believe the Doctor would be associated with such men. I’m not even sure that the people who sent this message – I mean –’ I gestured at the code sheets.

Elgar bent down so that his face was level with mine. I could smell his breath, oddly clean, metallic, like gun oil. ‘Mr Turing, your job is to break codes. I’m asking you to break them. The Doctor is a wanted man. If you see him you will hand him in, or you may share his fate. Is that clear?’

His gaze was frightening. I have compared Greene’s to that of a hawk, but this was the look of something far more implacable than any bird of prey: I can only think of William Blake’s ‘Tyger’, the Beast of the Industrial Revolution: *What the hammer? what the chain?*

In what furnace was thy brain?

If Elgar had drawn his pistol and pressed it against my skull, like an American gangster, I wouldn't have been surprised, but he didn't. He stood up again, waved at the papers in front of me and asked, 'What is all this?'

I was shaking so much that I could hardly reply. 'Th-th-the D-d-d-Doctor's message, sir,' I said, sounding just as weak and intimidated as I felt.

'Why are you keeping it here? I want that message sent now.'

'I'm not sure it's – complete – correct –' I choked on the words. They felt like a betrayal of the Doctor.

Elgar swaggered across the room to the window. 'So you don't trust him either, eh? Well, don't worry. This message is my problem.'

I would have thought the exact opposite was true: arresting the Doctor was Elgar's problem, and decoding the message was mine. But I didn't feel like arguing. I could hear the Doctor's voice echoing in my mind: *Go along with him – he knows more than we do.*

Very well, Doctor, I thought. I'll trust that piece of advice, at any rate.

'I'm not getting anywhere with checking the message, sir,' I told Elgar, truthfully enough. 'The Doctor's genius is unique.'

Elgar glanced at me, his eyes cold. 'I was told that you were the most able man on Earth in that area.'

I blushed at the praise, inappropriate and inaccurate though it was. 'Yes. I was one of the best, though there were others just as good. But certainly, from what I have seen of his work here in the last few days, the Doctor is better than any of us.'

'Is that why you like him so much?'

I shook my head. 'I like him because of who he is. I believe he may have been misled, but –' I lied – 'I don't think he would kill anyone.'

Elgar nodded. 'Believe what you like. I know the truth, or most of it.'

'And what is the truth?' I asked.

But he left without answering, closing the door behind him with a precise click.

I suppose it was inevitable that, later that day, I should be the one to find the Doctor again. In retrospect it's obvious that I was looking for him, though at the time my mind told me I was merely going for a walk. It was a walk that led through the ever-gloomy Parisian streets to the café where the Doctor had told me about his failure to join the RAF, the cafe with the long windows and the silent, middle-aged woman with her folded arms and dismissive manner.

He was there, drinking red wine, speaking in French with a young blond man. As far as I could tell – the French was rapid and idiomatic – they were discussing the shortages and privations of wartime Paris. I hesitated – my doubts must have shown in my face.

The Doctor looked up and smiled, said in English, 'Do join us, Alan!'

I had little choice but to sit. I glanced at the door, wondering belatedly if I had been followed.

The Doctor introduced the young Frenchman as Bernard. We shook hands, and Bernard enquired in polite if halting English after my health. We then had a slow and rather confused conversation in both languages, about the various cafés in the district and their merits. Bernard objected to most of them because they did not serve coffee.

'But there is one that has coffee always. It is called Le Bar, for the Americans.

It is always the Americans who get things and it will be just like that after the war. The Americans – everything. The French, the English, the Russians –

nothing. The Americans have won this war and they will not let us forget that.'

Bernard was becoming genuinely angry as he spoke, his face flushed, his gestures violent. I wondered why he disliked the Americans so much, when they had liberated his country.

Unless he had been a collaborator with the Nazis – in which case –

I looked at the Doctor. His face was shadowed, and he seemed to be staring into outer space – or, more likely, inner space. I could see guilt there, and a sort of terror. Was I looking at a murderer? Had he

murdered before? Would he do so again?

‘What do you think about it, Alan?’

Bernard’s question lifted me out of my fog of suspicion and fear – but by this point I’d forgotten the topic of conversation.

‘The Americans will have everything,’ prompted the Doctor in a flat voice, without moving his head. ‘Discuss, with particular reference to President Tru-63

man’s undoubted good intentions and the Americans’ unshakeable belief that they are the best people in the world.’

I tried to laugh, but the sound was half strangled. Bernard looked from me to the Doctor, and back again, and frowned.

‘I don’t understand,’ he said.

‘The Americans have a good deal,’ I said, thinking of my year at Harvard.

‘But they don’t, as Mrs Morton would have said, “get the benefit”.’

‘What do you mean?’ Bernard still sounded confused.

‘Oh, I don’t know. They’re insincere, they take the world for granted. Most of them have no depth.’

‘Oh, Alan, you’re generalising horribly! You must know better than that!’

I glanced up at the Doctor. ‘You talk as if you were my house tutor!’

He had the grace to smile. ‘And you talk, and think, most of the time, as if you were a schoolboy.’

I felt a moment of almost unbearable liking for the Doctor, a warm rush of friendship. Perhaps inevitably this reminded me why I was here, and what news I had for the Doctor.

‘There are some things I need to tell you,’ I said, glancing at Bernard. ‘In private.’

Bernard’s English wasn’t that bad. ‘It seems you two must talk,’ he said.

‘And I must return to the factory.’ He stood up. ‘I will see you again perhaps.’

I watched him go. Certainly he played the chance acquaintance well, but I was learning to trust no one and no appearances. Bernard could be anyone.

The Doctor could have met him here deliberately. He might even be waiting outside. He might be armed. . .

No. This was paranoia. I made a conscious effort to stop.

‘Come on, Alan, ask me.’

The Doctor was staring into inner space again. His eyes were quite still, unblinking.

There was an uncomfortable silence.

‘Ask you what?’ I said at last.

‘Whether I did it. Whether I killed her. I can see suspicion, you know. I can smell it.’

I blushed and stammered. ‘I-I w-wasn’t about to – I mean –’

Killed *her*? How did he know?

‘You knew it wasn’t Elgar?’ I asked.

He shrugged. ‘You think I can’t tell the difference between male and female screams?’

Actually, they hadn’t sounded like either. I was reminded suddenly that there was something beyond my understanding here, something of White 64

Rabbits and Wonderland, of languages that were not spoken on the Earth I knew.

‘It’s all right, Alan. I don’t blame you. The evidence for my guilt is there.

If I didn’t know I hadn’t done it, I’d be almost certain I had, believe me.’

Suddenly he looked up, his face loosened, and he was giving me one

of those broad, innocent grins. 'But I didn't, which means we have to work out who did. Number-one suspect –' He met my eyes.

I took my cue: the answer was obvious enough. 'Elgar. Since it was his room, and he's so keen to blame you. Simple misdirection. And he had access to the room at all times. But why? He was working with her.'

'Or he was pretending to. Or he was once her confederate, and has now betrayed her. Or she was about to betray him, and he got there first. Assumptions, Alan, the world is littered with assumptions. Most of them die, but a few fall on fertile ground and turn out to be the truth.' He swirled his wine.

'The trick is to work out which ones are true before anyone else does.'

'How are you going to do that?'

He shrugged. 'I can't tell you.'

'Because you can't remember?'

'Because you don't trust me.'

I felt as if I had been punched in the face.

'Don't worry, I've told you I don't blame you. I wouldn't trust me either. In truth, I don't trust me very much, most of the time. Which is why I'm going to leave now, and you're going to stay here.'

I looked away, towards the surly bar owner. She gazed at me, indifferent. I wondered if she understood our foreign conversation.

The Doctor was getting up.

'Wait!' I called. 'There are things I need to tell you!' I was thinking of Elgar's hardly veiled threats. I owed it to my friend to warn him, to give him a chance to get away.

But the Doctor didn't stop. I slapped a five-franc note down on the table and followed him into the street.

He was gone.

And this time I couldn't find him.

Chapter Nine

It was a more difficult question than any code, any equation, any problem of logic. To betray, or not to betray? In one way it was simple: I couldn't turn the Doctor in, because I didn't know where he was. I could tell Colonel Elgar where he had been, and I could tell them about Bernard – but these facts were probably useless. However, in another way, it was a stark choice. I had been ordered to tell Elgar if I met the Doctor. There existed the possibility that the information I had would be sufficient to enable Elgar to track him down.

Therefore if I gave the information, I could be responsible for my friend's death. If I didn't, as well as breaking my oath to my country, I might be responsible for the deaths of others – others like the woman, Elgar's colleague, who may or may not have been killed by the Doctor, accidentally or not.

My head ached as I walked back to the hotel. I felt physically ill, as if I were suffering from influenza. I shook, I sweated, I felt alternately hot and cold. By the time I reached the hotel – I believe I took a circuitous route –

I was sufficiently unwell that I forgot about the closed-off floor, and almost went to my former room, only to be turned back by a pretty young Marine.

He noticed I was ill, and called a bellboy to escort me to my new room. The

'boy' – a grizzled old Frenchman who had probably fought in the last war –

was also worried by my condition, and offered to fetch me a brandy 'on the house'. I was grateful to accept.

I stood with my brandy in my darkened room, staring out of the window at the dark capital of a strange country, feeling cold and ill and entirely unable to make a decision. I had no idea of the whereabouts of either Elgar or Greene, in any case.

Gradually I came to a decision: I must speak to Greene. Surely his brilliant, subtle mind would understand that there was more to this than the Doctor's guilt or innocence. He, too, had decided to trust the Doctor on the strength of his feelings – that was why we were here. I was certain he wouldn't go along with Elgar's brutish interpretation of the truth.

But did he have any authority? I considered this problem for a while, and decided that the best thing was to get him on my side first, and work out the rest afterwards.

It was midnight before I felt I had the strength to act upon my decision: and by then it was too late to find out which was Greene's new room. Only 67

the night porter was about, and he was as elderly as the bellboy and spoke no English.

In halting French I tried to obtain the information I needed. ' *La chambre de Monsieur Greene – er, non, Monsieur White – Blanc. . . ?* '

I must have sounded like an idiot, and the porter treated me as one – that or he smelled the brandy on my breath. ' *Allez vous couches,* ' he said. ' *Dormir –*

le matin tout sera mieux. '

I decided the old man was right. There was nothing that I had to say that couldn't wait until the morning.

As I returned to my room, I became aware of Elgar's mechanical snoring. I couldn't be sure of the source: it seemed to fill the passageway. It was like the sound of a war machine on the move – a tank perhaps, or something stranger.

I even fancied I could hear the rattle of caterpillar treads in the sound of his breathing.

I went to bed with the curtain open, and slept little, dreaming fitfully of war machines far bigger than any real tanks or aircraft, secret German weapons as huge as hillsides, sprouting machine-laid fires of destruction.

In the morning, Greene and Elgar were gone – that is, they had left the hotel altogether, and for good. I was told as much by the concierge, then, whilst I was still working out what this might mean, I was met at breakfast by an English sergeant named Brevell, who told me that he had been given orders to accompany me back to Bletchley.

'By train, sir, and boat,' he added. 'I gather you didn't like the aeroplane ride.'

I hadn't, but that wasn't the point. I felt suspiciously as if I were under

a sort of house arrest. I asked Sergeant Brevell where Greene and Elgar were.

‘Greene? Don’t know of a Greene, sir. Colonel Elgar’s gone to the base at Montmereil.’

‘And after that?’

‘Can’t say, sir.’ He shrugged. ‘And to be honest, I don’t know. I’ve been told by the colonel to get you on the ten-thirty train for Cherbourg – which gives us just an hour and a half, sir, so if you don’t mind packing straight after you’ve finished your breakfast –’

It was my turn to shrug. I gazed at my half-empty plate – the remains of a fried egg, half a slice of bread, and a piece of sausage. I didn’t want to eat any more. I got up, nodded at the sergeant and went to my room. I didn’t have much to pack: it seemed at that moment as if my entire life was so empty that it could fit into one small suitcase. A few shirts, a spare pair of trousers, some crumpled underwear – that was me. Even the room seemed dingy, the walls showing their cracks in the grey morning light. I thought of Bletchley –

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and my return to Hanslope afterwards – but no warm remembrance clicked in. I felt that I lived a hollow life, where a fascination with numbers and codes substituted for any real human contact. A life of greys, dimly shading away, the graph of my emotions flat.

I knew then that I did love the Doctor – a possible traitor whom I would probably never see again, and whom I might have to betray to the authorities if I did. It didn’t make my life more interesting to know this. It only filled the grey void with an aching confusion. I began to feel ill again.

A knock on the door. ‘You all right, sir?’ Sergeant Brevell.

I made an effort to compose myself. ‘I will be five minutes,’ I told him.

I dressed, and looked at the blade of my razor. I distinctly remember contemplating whether to shave, or simply cut my throat with it.

That was the first time. I have thought of suicide since, many times. I do not think that I was entirely serious about it on that first occasion. Behind my momentary depression, I still had hope. But the thoughts that crossed my mind frightened me. As a result it was less than five

minutes before I was shaved, packed, dressed and ready to go.

We reached the Gare du Nord in good time. The place had the air of a military depot: there was a column of deep blue French Army trucks parked in the taxi rank, surprisingly clean, their grey canvases flapping in the wind. The platforms were piled with bags and bolsters, steel crates and what appeared to be parts of disassembled field guns. Trains hustled and thudded, pistons spinning, chimneys spewing steam and smuts. They reminded me uncomfortably of the war machines of my dreams. Brevell led the way through it all, threading a path like a dog on the scent. I found myself boarding a blue-and-gold Pullman train. It was a peculiar feeling, stepping into the plush, clean, carpeted carriages, with their ornate wood carvings and gilding, amidst the military chaos outside.

It was half an hour before the train left, during which time a uniformed steward appeared and provided us with drinks. The sergeant tried to get himself a cup of tea, but was rewarded with an unlikely looking greenish liquid which he sniffed once and quietly poured away through the window.

When I saw this I opted for lemonade.

The train was moving, albeit slowly, when the steward returned. Or, rather, a different steward, with blue eyes, a head of light-brown curls, and an ill-fitting uniform.

It was the Doctor.

I stared at him for a moment, saw his tiny, flickering glance towards Brevell.

Of course. The sergeant didn't know who he was, and I mustn't do anything 69

that would make him suspicious.

The Doctor made a slight gesture of the hand, towards the passageway outside our compartment. I guessed that there should be a delay, so drank my lemonade first, and watched the suburbs of Paris drift past. The train was going so slowly it seemed likely to be nightfall before we made the port.

I got up and told Brevell I needed the lavatory. He merely nodded. The Doctor wasn't in the passageway: I found him standing in the narrow, noisy gap between carriages.

‘We have to go to Dresden,’ he said.

Not that again! ‘Doctor,’ I said in a stage whisper, over the creaking and clattering of the train. ‘I can get you to England – perhaps – if you need to go back there. But don’t ask me to –’

‘I’m not asking you: I’m telling you. I have to get to Dresden before they do, and I need your expertise.’

‘They?’ But I knew who he meant.

‘Greene and Elgar.’

‘How do you know?’

‘I asked at the hotel.’

‘But how do you know they’ve gone to Dresden?’

‘Where else? Elgar’s set the trap, now he’s gone to spring it. I don’t know whether Greene will go with him, but it seems too much of a coincidence that he’s vanished as well. I hope he’ll be there – we need an ally.’

‘Doctor, your use of the word “we” tells me you’re making some assumptions here. I don’t see how you can get to Dresden, and as I’ve told you, there is no possibility that I can help you, let alone come with you.’ I was trying to keep my words reasonable, but I was shaking with excitement and confusion.

I wanted to go, yearned for it, even though I knew it was impossible and stupid.

‘Bernard can get us across the border,’ said the Doctor. ‘We’ll have to lie to him, but that’s a small sin, and I’ll do it if you like.’

‘Bernard!’

‘Yes. He’s a collaborator – at least, he ran a business that served German officers and their wives. He’s shipping some of his friends to Switzerland tomorrow – not that it will do them any good in the long run, of course. We could join them, for a small fee.’

I looked around the tiny, swaying space between the carriages, through the window to the passageway. The doors to the compartments, compressed by perspective, were all closed. I imagined normal people behind those doors, businessmen, perhaps, or officers

on leave, going home to their businesses or their wives, burdened with normal worries that didn't include accompanying 70

a half-mad traitor into enemy territory and paying a Nazi collaborator for the privilege.

'No,' I said. 'I can't possibly have anything to do with that. In any case, it's no good going to Switzerland –'

'One of them is German. Going on to Dresden.'

'And that means they'll let us through the border?'

'This is smuggling, Alan. We're not crossing at the border posts.' He grabbed my shoulders. 'Come on, it will work!'

I realised then that I'd fallen in with an assumption the Doctor had set up in our conversation, that is, that I was willing to go but was doubtful about the practicality of the arrangements.

'No,' I said again. I snatched myself away from his hands, turned and pushed open the heavy door that led back to the compartment. I half hoped the Doctor would say something, enter some further plea in his defence, but there was only the sound of the door banging shut behind me.

I turned, saw a steward, only a steward, hurrying away from me along the passageway in the next carriage, past the compressed perspective of the compartment doors.

Brevell expressed no curiosity as to my prolonged absence: he was reading a book on motorcar maintenance. He glanced up at me. 'Got anything to read, sir?'

'Actually, I haven't,' I confessed. 'I've never been much of one for novels, and practical matters I prefer to learn by practising them.'

Brevell nodded. 'So do I. But it's going to be a long journey. I need something to do, and I don't like novels either.'

'When will we reach Cherbourg?'

'It's Le Havre now, sir. There's been a change of plan – the railway track has been damaged by a military transport train. Got derailed. And we'll not get there until five.'

We were in fact stopping as he spoke, still within the built-up area of

Paris.

‘You married, sir?’

I glanced at him, puzzled as to the reason for such a personal question. For the first time I noticed his face: round and clerical, with a neat head of blond hair. He looked as if he should be in a suit, behind a counter at a bank or a high-class shop. I guessed that within a couple of years he would be.

‘I’ve been married five years,’ he told me, evidently taking my silence as a

‘no’. ‘Day after war broke out, we married, Joan and I.’ He paused. ‘Two kids, both boys. I was worried about them, and the missus, all the way through this war. I still worry, with the buzz bombs and that. But it makes you realise.

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Having kids – that’s what it’s all for. Why we’re fighting. For their future, so they can have it better than us.’

‘And will that make them any different from us?’

‘Different!’ He shook his head. ‘Why should they be any different, Mr Turing? I’d want them to be just the same as me. Only better off. No war and that.’

‘So you want carbon copies?’ I regretted the remark as soon as I’d made it, and I saw the stiffening of Brevell’s face that indicated he had not understood my humour and had become offended.

When he spoke, there was an edge of harshness in his voice. ‘Get married, Mr Turing. That’s what I suggest. A man don’t get married, he gets cynical.

Forgets what life is really all about. It’s like that song – “birds do it, bees do it”.

Making carbon copies is life, Mr Turing. That –’ he waved out of the carriage window, and I saw that a train was grinding past on the next track loaded with canvas-sheathed field guns – ‘that’s death. There isn’t anything else, just life and death. You think there is, when you’re young –’ I was fairly sure he was younger than I was – ‘but it isn’t so. Joan taught me that. That’s why she made me marry her before I went

away to war. And she was right.'

I felt like assassinating him, there and then, for the blandness of his senti-ments. There was a whole world he didn't understand, was content never to understand, and was content for his children never to understand. A world of mathematics and magic and science and beauty. I wanted to tell him about it, but he was reading his book again, and besides, I felt I'd offended him enough already.

The train began to move, albeit slowly, and I was offered a view of flat fields under leaden clouds, lines of poplars, rivers laden with dull brown mud. After a while, I began to realise I'd done Brevell an injustice. He was, after all, reading a book on motor maintenance. There was no difference between that and mathematics. Both operated from a set of axioms; both had rules that needed to be followed; and both were capable of practical application to the real world. Perhaps, in the scheme of things, motor maintenance was actually more useful.

For a whimsical moment I wondered what Brevell would have said about the difference between mathematics and motor maintenance, and imagined him saying, 'Both the same, sir, if you ask me, except that one has more mess.'

I wondered which that would be, as the train, gathering speed, rattled on.

After a moment or two I realised I was wool-gathering. I shouldn't be doing that. Not when I had a choice. Not when I had the kind of choice that men such as Brevell were seldom if ever offered, and wouldn't have recognised if it had been offered to them.

And what a choice! Here in the carriage was the safe fascination of me-72

chanical things, the solid reality of a future in which children grow up just like their parents. Outside in the passageway was the unsafe fascination of love, the liquid reality of a future where people did stupid things because the rules changed all the time and you had to feel your way through life. A reality that I could barely comprehend and that terrified me above any feeling of excitement.

I knew which I needed to choose.

I knew which I *would* choose.

I excused myself again, blaming it on too much wine the previous

night, and escaped into the passageway. I found the Doctor in the next carriage, with a tray in his hand bearing two full champagne glasses.

He caught my eye and smiled. ‘Would you like some more lemonade, sir?’

‘I’ll go,’ I said.

‘I know.’ He was still smiling. ‘Perhaps, then, we should have the champagne.’

He handed me a glass, and I held it, perfect, crystal, full of tiny bubbles. I laughed like a child, and so did he.

I know for certain now that it was the best moment of my life. I have known nothing better, before or since, than standing on that swaying train with the Doctor, with the grey French fields passing outside, and the murder of war ahead.

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Book Two

The Heart of the Matter

Chapter Ten

Since Turing is now dead, I am forced at this point to impose on you a break in the narrative, and a change of narrator. It’s something I would never do to a reader of one of my novels. In a work of fiction, such a change of direction is irritating. If an author can’t say everything from the point of view of one ‘I’, then he had better stick to the third person (but perhaps I’m being too much the jaded professional here – I’ve had my own huge difficulties with ‘I’ novels, and I’m perhaps the last person to tell other authors what to do).

I did consider continuing without a break, by adopting Turing’s style and point of view, but that would be neither fair nor honest, and perhaps impossible. I don’t know Turing’s side of the story, and (even after reading his narrative) I don’t understand the way he sees the world – it’s alien to everything I know.

My first impression when I met him in that cold Nissen hut in Bletchley was of a serious, effete, untidy man with a single valuable talent. He had the mind of a child – a weak child, timid and unyielding – and like a child he was given to tantrums when he didn’t

get his own way. His unnatural sexual orientation, and his imposition of that attitude on the asexual being of the Doctor, were typical of his attitude to life. He may not have been very much more sinful than any of us, but he had no guilt for his sins, and that made him less than a whole man.

I can't say I'm surprised that his death was a suicide – he smeared cyanide around an apple, and took a bite. At the inquest they hinted that he might have been 'of unsound mind' as a result of his deviant sexual behaviour –

there had been a trial, a public shaming, following a sordid affair with a street boy in 1952. However, I think the reasons for his death lay deeper than sex.

The way he chose to die – the knowing apple, poisoned from Eden – has that heightened Christian symbolism often chosen at desperate moments by those who call themselves atheists. Maybe he did, *in extremis*, begin to feel a human guilt for the way he had lived his life. I am given further hope for Turing by those last words of the transcript, in which he describes his decision to go with the Doctor in terms of a choice, love rather than the mechanism. Perhaps the poisoned apple was his second attempt at making that choice. If so, I hope it was more successful than the first.

* * *

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It was about six months after his death that I received the tape: a metal disc about two feet in diameter, spooled with dull, brown, plastic ribbon.

I had no means of playing it, and if I had the recorded sound would have been meaningless, if I understand Turing's remarks about encryption correctly.

However, the tape was accompanied by the above transcript. There was also a letter signed by an Intelligence operative, informing me that Turing had wanted me to have the tape, and that the transcription had been thoroughly vetted and found to contain no secret information.

It's self-evident that the second claim isn't true, and I don't know how the tape and transcript got out of the offices of the Intelligence services. I was suspicious, even a little nervous, as I read the

transcript, and I seriously considered sending the tape back. Then I saw the signature on the letter: 'Doctor John X Smith'. I chuckled then, recognising the touch of a familiar hand. The Doctor's insouciance, his way of using apparent coincidence, parallels that of our Maker Himself – a similarity which I think is neither deliberate nor accidental, but inevitable. As I looked at the scrawled signature it was as if the Doctor were standing by me again, with that earnest, encouraging smile on his face, telling me there was a meaning to this.

Or perhaps he wasn't there, wasn't anything to do with it. Perhaps the security services were just being stupid – they had been stupid enough during the war, and afterwards.

Whatever the Doctor's role in the matter, the security risks are real enough.

They are certain to prevent publication of this document for decades. I've chosen to allow the release of the papers in the year 2000, forty-six years hence, when the security risk will be minimal, and when, more importantly, all the principal characters in the action will (I hope) be dead. I have chosen to finish this story, since Turing has started it and since (perhaps) the Doctor wishes me to continue, but I don't want anyone to read it – not while I'm still around to answer for it.

Before I can continue, I need to point out some fundamental errors of fact in Turing's narrative. He doesn't appear to have understood – perhaps he never understood – the reasons why I became involved with 'the strangers', the makers of the Dresden Code. He appears to have assumed that I came to the case by accident. If he had questioned this assumption (as he would no doubt have questioned a mathematical one), he would have found that my involvement began long before his – probably before the Doctor's.

In 1942 I was working in Sierra Leone, based in the capital, Freetown. My job was to run agents – that is, to provide them with money, cover stories and communications, and to get information back to London. It was easy work, requiring some imagination and initiative, though there was a great deal of

dull and repetitive decoding to be done. What seemed best of all to me when I was first offered the post was that it would allow me to live away from the dull grey world of wartime England and yet still serve my country. Sierra Leone was not as significant a posting as I would have liked – there was little action there compared with Cairo or

Johannesburg – but it was a country I knew well, having travelled there in the thirties. And it was not a backwater: with the Mediterranean closed to shipping, all convoys had to go to Egypt and North Africa via the Atlantic and the West Coast, and Freetown was the main port of call. In addition, Sierra Leone had a long border with French Guinea, which was under Vichy French – and therefore German – control. It was always possible that an invasion might be mounted, and for this reason I ran a large number of agents in the remoter areas of the country. It was occasionally necessary for me to travel out of the capital to visit them.

These missions were a relief from the boredom that quickly descended upon me in the stifling capital city – on more than one occasion I'm convinced they saved my sanity. The discomforts and dangers of travel have never troubled me as much as the itchy depression that invades me when I stay in one place for too long. I would drive my hard-sprung car through fifty miles of heat and humidity to spend the night in villages that were no more than clearings in the jungle with a few ramshackle huts. I would sleep in a tent under double layers of netting and yet was still bitten by insects. I would meet agents in brick-built missions, shanty huts, on bare roads far from anywhere.

On such an expedition in June of 1942, I arrived at a village called Markebo to find it deserted. The place had a *Mary Celeste* air, the single street of wooden huts silent, not even a dog stirring. Unnerved, I stopped the car short and got out. My head boy, Jackson – a slope-shouldered Mende of greying hair and a certain lazy wisdom – was travelling with me, and he noticed it first. 'The air smells wrong, boss.'

He was right. The air of these villages would usually smell of cooking fires and animal shit, but this was more like London in the rush hour – before the war, when there was a great deal of motor traffic. It was a heavy, oily atmosphere, with a metallic, electrical odour. I looked around for vehicles, but saw none except my own Morris, incongruous as ever in the African bush.

I remember wondering if there had been an invasion. This was a time of particular danger, not long after De Gaulle's assault on Dakar. The village was only eight miles from the frontier. But I could see no vehicle tracks except our own.

I advanced along the road between the huts. It was the rainy season: the mud sucked at my boots, making progress slow and noisy. Nothing moved in response. I saw a hut with the door hanging open, and had a look inside.

There were dirty wooden bowls on a low table, and a stool had toppled. The 79

Mary Celeste came to mind again: I began to feel not afraid but unsettled.

Perhaps there had been a raid by cattle thieves – my friend Brodie, the police commissioner in Freetown, had mentioned that they were in this area. He'd suggested I go out armed, but I don't like carrying weapons.

I turned back and walked up the muddy road, ready to return to the relative safety of the vehicle and move on to the next village where I was due to meet my contact. I had my hand on the hot dry metal of the car – and Jackson had already got in – when a voice began to sing behind me. I couldn't tell if it was a man or a woman: it was of a pitch that could have been either. The tone was as rich and warm as a contralto in an opera house. There were no words. I listened for perhaps a minute, then called out. The voice stopped, then replied in a warbling recitative which was no language that I recognised.

Jackson jumped up in his seat and shouted a warning to me in English. At the same time I had the feeling of presence behind me.

I turned and saw a white man emerging from the shadows of the hut that I had just examined. He was dressed as an African chieftain, in the local dyed cloths, but there was a wrongness in the way he wore them. It wasn't just his white skin: his body was wrong. He carried himself in a light, awkward fashion, like a bird that has alighted on the ground to search for food but might at any moment take off again. And indeed he must have landed from the thin air, because I had looked inside that hut and I can swear there was no more than a single room, and that it had been empty.

Whilst I puzzled as to how he had got there, he sang to me. I looked at Jackson, who shrugged. I advanced along the street towards the stranger.

'Where are the Africans?' I asked.

Again, he stopped singing. Two more white men emerged from the hut, dressed in old loose clothes of the sort that ordinary African villagers might wear. Despite their white skins, they didn't look European: the way they carried themselves was wrong. One was bare-chested, and I noticed heavy collarbones protruding from his flesh. It was as if he were malnourished, though his ribs didn't show.

All three sang, to each other, to me, to Jackson, who had followed me down the street. They accompanied the singing with mannered, yet awkward, gestures. It was like an opera, and would have been funny, except for the signs of fear and abandonment around the village.

‘Where are the Africans?’ I asked again. ‘The people who live here – where?’

Jackson translated my question into a couple of the local languages. The strangers turned and looked at him but showed no sign of understanding.

I examined the shirtless man’s back, and saw that his shoulder blades protruded. I half expected to see the amputated stumps of wings. I experienced a moment of confusion, almost delirium. Was I asleep? Hallucinating? What 80

I was seeing, hearing, even what I was smelling, made no sense at all. It was not, could not, be connected with the real world of agents, telegrams and war.

I could see that Jackson was getting jittery – his hand was on the long knife at his belt. ‘Get back to the car,’ I called to him. ‘I’ll deal with this.’ Though I had no idea what to do.

I studied the faces of the strangers. They looked like bewildered children, on the cusp between simple confusion and tears. Could they be French spies, an advance guard for the invasion? The idea was ridiculous. Why dress as Africans? Why weren’t they armed? But if they were mad, it was a strange madness. It occurred to me that it might be the holy kind. Back then, I hadn’t seen any miracles, and I had the eager notion that I might be witnessing one: a direct intervention of the Divine in my life. It made no sense to think that way, but miracles are always nonsense.

I heard my voice saying the most absurd thing possible, which was, ‘I am English – come with me.’

Jackson looked on with an alert curiosity. But he was loyal, and said nothing. We accommodated two of the three strangers uncomfortably in the back of the car with the boy: the ‘chieftain’ rode with me in the front, his leg jammed up against the gear stick. He muttered a few snatches of song as we drove along, but although I tried phrases in every European language I could remember (which was quite a few), he made no response.

The next village, D'nalyel, was bigger. There was a redbrick Catholic mission with a school. Here I found a crowd of noisy Africans, some almost naked.

From their confused jabbering, half translated by Jackson, I worked out that these were the people who had fled from Markebo. But they showed no fear of the newcomers, which suggested that they had another reason for leaving.

I couldn't make myself understood in English, so I got the boy to translate.

'Ask them why they left the village.'

There was a great deal more chattering then, and fearful looks, and waving of hands. One of the villagers grabbed my arm and shook me, as if trying to alert me to a danger I couldn't see. No one showed much interest in the strangers, who sat in the car and watched the proceedings in silence, with expressionless faces.

'Demons,' said the boy at last. 'The sky turned black, and there were demons.'

I didn't believe that then, and I don't believe it now. I'm not sure what manifestation accompanied the strangers' appearance, but I doubt it was su-per-natural, in the sense that they believed, nor in the way that I half hoped for at the time.

I knew I would have to stay the night in this village: for one thing, it was where I was due to meet my contact. It was also growing dark. But it wasn't 81

going to be easy, with perhaps fifty families hiding in the mission building, and the cause of their displacement sitting in my car. I had already started to think of them as 'the strangers'. They had spoken no English nor any other recognisable language, and only whispers of song escaped them as I drove them to a maize field outside the city, where Jackson and I struck camp. We tried to find enough mosquito nets for everyone, but the strangers showed no interest in nets, or indeed in sleeping. They sat cross-legged on the mud beside the car, like skinny Buddhas, watching the sky.

In the morning I was woken by a bell ringing in the church, and African voices chanting. I got up, and saw that the strangers hadn't moved, but kept their vigil, watching the sky like statues. I felt unsettled again, and wondered why I had decided to take them with

me.

As I neared the village, I heard the familiar and comforting susurrus of prayer from the church. I hurried my steps, hoping to take Communion. I also wondered if the priest would know what the villagers meant by ‘demons’.

I was in the long morning shadow of the mission building when a voice spoke behind me. ‘We need your help.’

I knew without looking that the deep, musical voice could only come from one source. When I turned he was there, still in his African chieftain’s clothes.

His feet were splayed, his head cocked to one side. He looked slightly ridiculous, like a man playing giant parrot in a pantomime.

‘What can I do for you?’ I asked.

‘You can help us to find those we need to find.’

‘Who is that?’ There was suspicion in my voice: his words had made me forget everything strange, and think only of spies, agents, enemies of my country.

‘And why do you suddenly speak English?’

He looked at me with a comical expression of sorrow, as if he had expected me to understand. Perhaps I should have done.

‘It takes time to learn a language,’ he said. ‘I did not wish to risk being misunderstood.’ His voice was unaccented, his English a copy of mine. When I didn’t speak – couldn’t think of anything to say – he added, ‘We need to find those we need to find.’

I stared at the face, the eyes wide, the jaw a little slack. His skin was smooth. It wasn’t without blemish, but it seemed somehow unused. Most of the time I can form an impression of a man’s character from his expression.

The shape of the lines on the face, the movements of the eyes, the tone of the voice, reveal a great deal. It is one of the tricks of the novelist to observe well and describe the results of his observations in quick verbal strokes, like a cartoon sketch. But this man appeared to have nothing to offer in his face.

When he did wear an expression, it was exaggerated, and he wore it like a mask.

‘Why do you speak in tautologies?’ I asked, aware that I was trying to catch him out, and feeling ashamed of myself.

‘No. We need to find those we need to find.’

I tried a few more questions, but all the responses were similar. I was tempted to ask him the price of eggs, but I didn’t think his vocabulary would be up to it.

Instead I asked him if he would like to take Mass.

‘I can’t,’ he said. ‘It would not be part of the finding.’

‘Why?’

‘We are not the same.’

He could have been saying that he wasn’t a Catholic, or wasn’t a Christian, but I knew he meant more than that. More important, I knew that he meant something. He wasn’t talking complete nonsense: he was talking what sense he could, but with a very small vocabulary.

‘Who are you?’ I asked. ‘What is your name?’

‘That is not part of the finding. We are not the same.’

‘What do you mean, “part of the finding”?’ The conversation was frustrating me. I wanted to laugh at the silliness of it, but the expressionless face in front of me made laughter impossible.

We approached the mission. I had missed Mass: people were walking out of the church, in small groups, some barefoot, chattering. I waited for the priest, went up to him and shook his hand. He was an iron-haired, big-boned man with that false geniality that can hide anything from extreme cruelty to extreme suffering. I decided not to tell him about the strangers, nor did I attempt to explain the man who was with me. Instead I asked what had happened in Markebo, the deserted village.

‘Oh, the local people are afraid of lots of things,’ he said. ‘I expect there was a fire, or something. They’re getting over it. I’ve told them they should go back.’ He looked at me with a measuring stare. ‘Why,

is there any danger?’

‘There might be.’

He became agitated then, his head swivelling like a puppet’s, his arms jerk-ing as he waved at his parishioners. It was fear that he protected with his geniality, then.

I said, ‘I don’t think they’ll be in danger. Not in Markebo.’ I turned away, feeling awkward, because I had no idea whether I was telling the truth. On the face of it, the conversation with the ‘chieftain’ hadn’t been reassuring. ‘I’ll let you know if there are any developments,’ I muttered.

‘What are you?’ asked the priest. ‘Police or military?’ His eyes were shifty with the suspicion of a fear-filled man.

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‘Both,’ I said, truthfully enough, since my cover was CID and my work MI6.

‘And if you’ll excuse me, I have to see someone.’ Which was also true.

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Chapter Eleven

My agent in D’nalyel was a tiny man called Cray. He must have been about seventy. His face was as shrivelled as an old groundnut, his eyes dark and watery. Every time that we talked, his hands clasped each other tight, like two friends seeking comfort. His weakness was gambling and he worked for us because we were paying him to continue his habit across the border in French-controlled territory.

We met at his house, where I first had to take tea with his wife and his son and his son’s wife, with three skinny grandchildren jumping around, feeding the fire, which served to boil the kettle and also to make the air in the small hut smoky and even hotter than usual. At last, after what seemed like several hours, the family were dispatched to the village and I was able to ask Cray what he had seen across the frontier.

‘Lots of car, massa. Big car, very metal.’

This wasn’t exactly news: we knew from other sources that a French

armoured brigade was in the area. But Cray's next revelation was more disturbing.

He leaned forward and touched my hand. 'French *officer* speak with Cray.'

Cray's French was better than his English. 'Frenchey, he said see English very-big-weapon in sky. He want to know 'bout weapon.'

I knew there was no weapon. All the English had in the sky over Sierra Leone were a couple of old seaplanes. What had the Frenchman seen?

'He offer me six shillings. I tell him ten and he give ten.' The watery eyes were watching me as he added, 'My second son, his wife have 'nother child soon.'

'I'll pay you fifteen shillings,' I said. It was usually five: I would probably have to find the extra ten from my own pocket, but it didn't matter. I was thinking about Africans who fled in fear from a secret weapon that the French thought was English, which lit up the sky and left behind confused white men with blank faces and no language.

A silence outside distracted me. It was the silence that replaces the noises you hadn't noticed were there: the shouts, the children's voices, the clink-clink of corn being ground in a pot. Cray became aware of it, too, and we both stood up. Cray was shaking. 'I am an old man,' he said.

The door burst open, and the hut was full of black, angular figures and the 85

smell of gun oil. A man stood in front of me, and I recognised with a shock the uniform of a German SS officer.

'I am Leutnant Franz Schubert, Waffen Schutzstaffel. You are an English officer?'

'Police, actually.' I knew I was out of my depth here. If the SS sent a detachment to an obscure African territory, then this 'secret weapon' was very real and very important. It occurred to me that I might die.

'Police?' The officer's voice was cold. 'That will do.'

Cray was cowering in the corner: one of the other SS officers had a gun aimed at his head.

‘You will tell me everything you know about the others, or my colleague will kill this man now.’

I knew that by ‘the others’ he meant the silent strangers I had found in Markebo. I also knew that if there had been anything in my power that I could have used to protect them, or to protect Cray, I would have done so. As it was, unarmed and at gunpoint, all I had was prayer. I offered them that.

Outside, I heard gunshots, and a sound like an electric wire short-circuiting.

Cray’s captor sprang up and ran from the hut. Schubert looked after him, and I saw an expression of fear on his face that did not match the fierce professional confidence he had shown until now.

‘They aren’t –’ shouted a voice from outside, in English. It was unaccented: it might have been the priest. The sentence was cut off by an explosion.

Schubert ran from the hut: after a moment’s hesitation I followed. Outside, the air was full of smoke. Two bright fires were burning: each had the hideous shape of a man, slowly melting under the heat. The shapes folded into a mess of oily stinking matter that could never have been flesh. I gagged on the thick air, and saw one of the Africans being sick.

The Germans were retreating, guns drawn, their expressions panicky and hopeless.

Two down, I realised: which meant one of ‘the strangers’ was still alive. I felt relief and at the same time the sort of terror and confusion that accompanies a bad dream. Action, for me, is a relief from boredom. I have faced threats to my life before and since without fear: this fear was born of knowing that the situation was beyond my knowledge, as well as out of my control. I knew as little as the Africans did about the fight that was happening around me.

‘Massa! Massa!’ It was Cray, emerging. ‘I din’ know. I din’ know ’bout those men!’

I looked around, and realised the Germans were gone. Cray was clinging on to my arm. I saw Jackson standing with his knife drawn, guarding the car. From the shadows of the trees around us came the screams of men in 86

unimaginable terror, and a splintering sound that might have been the breaking of branches – or bones. Then there was a silence, a heavy dragging sound, a series of rasps and clicks. I waited – we all waited – as the sounds faded away, moving towards the river. There was, perhaps, a splashing of water, then silence.

‘I din’ know!’ bawled Cray. ‘I don’ understand!’

He did, perhaps. Or perhaps he didn’t. I looked again at the melted shapes that I had thought were men, and decided that what Cray had known about it all didn’t matter.

The rest of the African story is that curious anticlimax which happens so often in real life and so rarely in novels. I made a brief search of the town, in the hope of finding the surviving stranger, but failed to do so. There was some blood in the bush, and a trail of broken bushes which led to the river. The smell of metal and oil was strong.

I questioned Cray some more about his meeting with the French officer, but he told me nothing else of substance, except that the weapon had been ‘very bright’. I examined the melted ‘strangers’, and had the priest say last rites over them, though both he and I were unsure whether this was appropriate.

I caught a sick fear in his face, and wondered if I was leaving him and his parishioners to die. But there was nothing I could do, except pay Cray his fifteen shillings and leave.

Back in Freetown, I reported the incident. I was careful not to mention the strangers, only that the SS had killed two white men, travellers of uncertain identity, and that some of the Germans may have been killed in return. I speculated that the whites may have been agents, though the theory was ridiculous to me. As I had expected, nothing much happened as a result. There was a brief excitement, a flurry of telegrams, and a certain amount of interference from the SIS, who sent their agents to the area. I lost Cray, who may have defected to the French. I carried on working, and tedium silted up my memories of Markebo, until they became nothing more than an African curiosity, a story unfolding at the edges of civilisation and having meaning only in that setting.

In January 1943, my tour of duty in Sierra Leone came to an end. During my last week in Freetown, I met the Doctor for the first time. He was under arrest, in one of the concrete cells behind the police station. Brodie had said that he didn’t know what to make of him. He

had appeared from nowhere, had no papers, and appeared to be innocent of the need for any. I'd told the true story of the Markebo incident to Brodie in an unguarded moment. It was clear from the uncertain expression in my friend's eyes as he opened the cell door for me that he felt the Doctor may be the missing stranger, my 'chieftain'.

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The air around the cell smelled, as always, of urine and stale cooking. The Doctor was crouched on a mattress in the corner, dressed in a white fancy shirt and dark trousers, with formal shoes, as if he had just come half dressed from a dinner party. He clearly wasn't the stranger, and looked nothing like him.

His body was shadowed, curved forward over itself. At first, I decided he had been crying. Then I saw he was making something, weaving straw between his fingers to make an object rather like a corn dolly. He said nothing, but I heard the sound of his breathing, deep and uneven.

'I don't like being locked up,' he said.

He looked up, and I saw his green eyes watching me from under a head of foppish curls. I knew then that he wasn't a weak man. He was like a cat, stealthy and powerful. I remembered that cats don't like being locked up.

'You shouldn't sneak across the border without a passport.'

'Nonsense. The Africans do it all the time.'

'You aren't an African,' I pointed out.

'No.'

'You're English?'

'No.'

'So were you in Markebo last year?'

He smiled. It was the smile of a knowing man who has found another that he can speak with on equal terms. 'No.'

'But you know what I'm talking about?'

'Do you know what you're talking about?' A disappointed irritation

showed in his voice.

I hesitated, wrong-footed. 'No.'

He sighed. 'It always catches up with me.' He went back to the corn dolly, or whatever it was.

'All right, just tell me how much you know,' I said.

‘There were three of them. Two were killed, if you can call it that. We have to find the other one.’

I decided it was time to be reticent. I was already aware that the Doctor would be a formidable adversary. ‘At least two men were killed in D’nalyel last year,’ I said.

He sighed again. ‘Oh, well. Lie if you want to.’

I felt like an awkward schoolboy caught out by his teacher. I was furious. I found a word I could pick on and began to beat it to death. ‘Why do you say

“we” have to catch the stranger? Are you on the same side as the Waffen SS?’

‘Don’t be silly. I haven’t met any SS officers.’

Trumped again, I turned to the door, which was steel with a shuttered window that let on to a dull corridor. ‘For what you’ve said already I could hand you over to –’

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‘The SIS, the Security Police, the Thought Police. Yes I know. But you’re not going to.’ There was a calm certainty in his voice. ‘Do you know how unimaginative you sound, Mr Greene? I’m disappointed. Your novels are better.’

I thought about it, and laughed. ‘I have to admit you’re right, Doctor – Doctor what, by the way? Brodie said you wouldn’t give your name.’

‘Just Doctor will do.’

‘You must have a name.’

‘I’ve lost my memory.’ He treated me to an innocent smile. ‘No memory, no name, no papers. Convenient, isn’t it?’

It was my turn to stage a sigh. ‘You know, Doctor – cases of total amnesia are rare. It’s more common in literature, and quite frequent in movies, where it’s an easy way of making mystery where there otherwise wouldn’t be any. In life –’

‘Yes yesyes, but all that doesn’t alter the fact that I have lost my

memory and you're going to have to deal with it.'

'I'm going to have to keep you here – or, rather, Brodie is. And you've just admitted to consorting with the enemy –'

'No, I haven't. I didn't consort with anyone. I told you that we – you and I –

have to catch a very dangerous person. Possibly more than one by now. Are you going to help?'

'Doctor, the SS are Hitler's personal bodyguard. I know they're dangerous, but it's hardly my job to catch them, and it certainly isn't yours.'

'You're not listening!' He stood up suddenly, and I could sense the impatience. He was like a lion in a cage, angry and hungry. 'Let's stop messing about, Mr Greene. I came here on purpose. I knew you had to be the Englishman who was in Markebo.' He grabbed my shoulder, and met my eyes with a powerful, urgent expression. 'We need to find the stranger, the one that survived, before he finds us.'

'You are very ready with the melodrama, Doctor. But I don't quite see why I should be helping the SS find him. Is he a threat to us? I felt no sense of threat when I was with him.'

He raised his eyebrows and turned away. 'People rarely do. But yes, he might be a threat to us. If I could remember more –'

The corn dolly lay abandoned on the bed. It was strange, half unravelled into human shape from a different raw material. I had an insight into the truth then, but it flickered and was lost, because it seemed too improbable.

'How much do you remember, Doctor?' I asked.

He looked at me and smiled. 'You want to hear the truth?'

'Tell me what you know and I'll listen.'

* * *

The Doctor had left England in the autumn of 1940. He didn't explain why. It may have been because of his rejection by the RAF – the story he told Turing.

But he told so many stories to Turing that I can't be sure it was true. In any case there are certain to have been deeper reasons. During the worst years of the war, he had travelled in South America and Africa. In October 1942

he came to Sierra Leone and heard of the Markebo incident from the local people. He examined the remains of the strangers, then crossed the frontier in search of the SS squad. He made this seem like an act of innocent bravado, but I wasn't fooled. He must have known the risk he was taking.

'Why did you go?' I asked.

'I had to meet them – I had to know. What I found in Markebo was like –' He hesitated, his hands clasped. 'Have you ever lost your memory Mr Greene?'

'Once or twice, when drunk.'

He grinned. 'Not the same thing. I have lost so much – and what I found in Markebo was a clue. An impossibility. I have been looking for an impossibility for a long time. I found a couple but they didn't lead me anywhere that I wanted to go – I think this one might be different.'

I recalled my own yearning to witness miracles, and nodded.

'The SS men – I knew. I just knew.'

He hesitated. I almost asked what he 'just knew', but thought better of it.

'I found that they had gone back to Germany,' the Doctor went on. 'It must have been getting difficult to stay – you know the Vichy French are nearly finished.'

I knew he was right, from my own sources, but didn't give anything away.

'They chose the wrong camouflage. The wrong side. The Germans must have looked stronger, bursting into the village like that, fully armed.'

'What do you mean?'

He made an exasperated noise. 'Mr Greene, you're an intelligent man.

The SS men died – you heard it happen, and the priest and the villagers heard it too. Yet the ‘SS men’ went back to Germany, still very much alive. How do you explain that?’

‘Maybe they didn’t all die.’ The explanation sounded inadequate, probably because it was. I tried a stronger attack on his line of reasoning. ‘How do you know they were still alive?’

‘When I checked the German paperwork in Vienna – and the Germans always keep paperwork, believe me, tons of the stuff – I found that they were in the Ivory Coast under cover. I’m not sure why. . . ’

Another man might have interrupted with, ‘You were in Vienna! How did you get there?’ But I kept my silence, and didn’t watch the Doctor’s face – I could only see rapid earnestness there. I listened to his words instead, waiting 90

for him to fall over them. He was a garrulous man, and I knew from experience that garrulous men always give something away, even if nothing they say is true.

‘The paperwork showed that they returned from there, the full complement, under the command of one Oberleutnant Franz Schubert. The other names were interesting – Leutnants Mozart, Brahms, Beethoven, Wagner, Strauss and Bruckner.’

I chuckled. ‘With cover names like that you’d think they were trying to get captured! Even the SIS wouldn’t be so stupid.’

The Doctor gave me a sly glance. ‘No, probably not. I have a feeling they got the names from listening to the radio. It must have been classical night.’

He chuckled. ‘I’m glad you agree that they must be cover names.’

‘German cover names. For a German operation. That’s what you said.’

‘No, no. Schubert was a cover name. The others were different. They changed them.’

‘So because they changed their names they’re different people?’

‘Probably.’

‘So what are you saying – they’re spying on the Germans now? Who would do that, other than the Allies? The Japanese?’ Or the Turks, I

thought. I remembered a story that my recruiting officer had told me, about the (male) Turkish agent in Paris whose cover name had been Chanel Parfum.

‘Think! They’re not Japanese, or English.’

‘So who. . . ?’

‘I know them.’ The Doctor’s voice had changed: it was solemn, almost sepulchral. ‘I know them, and I feel sure they would know me. They are – like me. Not like you, or Brodie, or anyone else. I can’t explain.’

He was sounding exactly as the ‘chieftain’ had in D’nalyel, except that his English was better. Nonetheless I asked him, ‘What do you mean?’

‘Oh, I don’t know them as in having a cup of tea. I’ve never met them – not these particular people. It’s the feel of them, the way they are, that’s familiar.

They’re operating in a world they don’t understand.’

I remembered the strangers, the expressionless faces, the incomplete vocabulary. ‘Yes, you’re right there. But who are they?’

The Doctor didn’t reply, but stared at the corn dolly on the bed, as if in need of comfort. I became aware of footsteps in the passage outside: Brodie. I swore aloud.

The Doctor raised his eyebrows. ‘A key point in the interrogation, Mr Greene?’

I nodded. ‘Go away, Brodie,’ I yelled through the door.

There was a silence, then a loud, theatrical cough and the sound of retreating footsteps.

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The Doctor and I shared a smile.

‘So a group of people who don’t know anything are masquerading as SS

officers in Vienna?’

‘Dresden, I think,’ said the Doctor absently.

‘Wherever they are, it doesn’t seem as if we need to get involved.’

‘Yes, we do.’ The Doctor’s tone was that of a reproving adult.

I remembered the feeling of safety and peace I’d had around the strangers, and allowed the correction to stand. ‘So what do you suppose we should do?’

‘I don’t know,’ said the Doctor, his voice again taking that hollow and sepulchral tone. ‘I never do.’

‘So. . . ?’

‘We need to visit Markebo,’ he said. ‘Together.’

Something in the way he spoke alerted that part of me that was an intelligence officer. I began to think of the Doctor as a man with a weakness – and thus a possible agent.

I shook my head. ‘I need to go back to England. You need to stay in here, until we work out what to do with you.’

He jumped up and almost shouted into my face. ‘I can’t stay here! I have to find out what’s happening. You don’t understand – I’ve lost so much – this is my only chance to get it back!’

The emotion was genuine, but it was old emotion: a feeling from the depths of his heart that was being dragged into battle, because he thought that it would work on me. I knew that, but even so the emotion did its job: I became convinced that the Doctor needed me.

I did not yet appreciate his subtlety. He fooled me, even as he didn’t fool me. I was accepting that he was weak, when he wasn’t, and that he could be suborned, when he couldn’t be. I was making plans to run him as an agent, whilst he was already beginning to run me as *his* agent.

I have never liked being used, which is probably why it went so badly for the Doctor when I discovered the truth.

Chapter Twelve

The Doctor and I travelled together back to Markebo on what should have been my last day in Sierra Leone. I’m not sure whether the Doctor thought there was anything new to see, or whether he’d

invented the journey as a means of persuading me to get him out of the cells. We poked around in the jungle, looking for the remains of the strangers, only to find when we asked in the village that the Africans had thrown them into the river ('Best place,'

the Doctor commented).

We returned to the river and sat on the banks. The Doctor kicked off his shoes and splashed his feet in the water, like a child. Ripples spread and were lost in the slow swirling of the green water.

'Be careful,' I told him. 'I shouldn't think it's clean.'

'The villagers wash their clothes in the river.'

'And use it as a toilet, I expect.'

He wrinkled his nose, but didn't remove his feet from the water.

'Besides,' I added, 'there are leeches.'

'Hmm.' The Doctor lifted his dripping feet out and examined his toes. 'Can't see any. Perhaps they don't like my blood.' He began drying his feet on a large white handkerchief. 'You shouldn't be so dismissive of the Africans, you know.'

'They're just the same as you.'

'In the sight of God,' I said.

'In anybody's sight,' he said.

There was an edge of irritation in his voice: though I hadn't intended to be derogatory towards the Africans, I felt chastised.

'Tell me,' he said, in a quite different tone, 'what do you think it takes to be human?'

Fool that I was, I mistook his meaning. I thought he was talking about maturity, and made an appropriate speech about what it is to be a man, the passion and the uncertainty, the terror, the boredom –

'The sweaty nights,' he interrupted. 'Yes, yes, yes, I know. I mean human –

as opposed to –' he waved at the river, and after a second's confusion I realised he meant the disposed 'bodies' of the strangers – 'not human.'

I knew, then. I looked away from the Doctor, at the light of the sky reflected in unsteady silver patches on the water. I wondered what shape the Doctor would melt into when he died.

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‘I think I would make the same answer,’ I said at last. ‘It’s passion that defines life. Passion, and suffering.’

‘And you’re not sure about me, are you?’

I looked at him, saw a living, breathing being, with an expression of uncertainty and the shadow of a great suffering on his face.

‘You’re not sure that I’m human.’ He leaned forward. ‘Well, let me tell you a secret. *I’m not sure either.*’

I looked into his eyes for a while, then I remembered the ‘chieftain’ and said, ‘We should take Mass together.’

He agreed, and we walked together to the small, hot, brick church, where there was a service about to begin. The fear-filled priest glanced at the Doctor several times during his brief sermon, with an expression that may have been distaste. I wondered whether this was merely a reaction to the Doctor’s foppish appearance, or sprang from some deeper source.

I didn’t watch the Doctor’s face as he took the Flesh and Blood into his mouth. I didn’t have quite that much gall. But I wanted to.

Later the priest took me aside and asked, ‘Who is that man with you?’

I could see the suspicion and aversion in his whiskered face. I was a fool again: I thought he had assumed the Doctor to be a bugger, and I his companion, and that his aversion was because of that.

‘He’s a scientist,’ I said, anxious to avoid the allusion. ‘He’s interested in the people who died here last year –’

The priest grabbed my arm. ‘He’s the Devil’s agent,’ he hissed. ‘Be sure of it.’

I stared at him, bemused by the melodrama. But there was sweat running down his face, and the grasp of his fingers on the muscle of my arm was like that of a drowning man.

‘Don’t be fooled by them fighting each other, now. They all belong to

Lu-cifer.’

‘You could say the same of any two armies,’ I told him. ‘The Devil works behind the truth, within the fabric of the world as a whole.’

He let go, stepped back. ‘Don’t think your Jesuit’s sophistry will save you, man. Recognise evil when you see it.’

‘He’s a *scientist*,’ I insisted, but I had lost conviction.

‘Sure he’s what you say he is,’ said the priest, ‘but ask who he works for.’

I didn’t ask. I thought the priest was ridiculous: simple truths may suffice for an African village, but the complex devilry of European war was beyond him.

The locals’ talk of sorcery, I decided, had worked its way into his superstitious 94

head. As we drove back to Freetown, I told the Doctor as much, making a joke of the priest’s melodrama, but he just shook his head.

‘I’d have thought you of all people wouldn’t be so eager to see the triumph of the rational. He’s seen something he doesn’t understand, so he’s afraid –

yes. But don’t underestimate anyone’s powers of perception. If he thinks he’s seen evil, he probably has.’

I stared at the bumpy road ahead. It was dry, with a low, dusty sun in the sky. An old man sat by the side of the road, begging with dignity: the Doctor insisted we slow down and throw him a coin, though I doubted he needed it.

‘The priest said *you* were evil, Doctor,’ I said as we sped away.

‘Don’t be so sure I’m not.’

We didn’t talk much after that. I left him at the port in Freetown: he said he would catch a Portuguese liner to Europe, but he left no forwarding address.

I hadn’t expected him to.

In the eighteen months after I left Africa, I was in charge of intelligence operations in Portugal – though my base was in England.

The work involved the remote supervision of agents, and the management of an elaborate double bluff. We knew who the German agents in Portugal were, because of our decryption of the ENIGMA codes. But we couldn't do anything to let them know we knew, or they would realise that the codes weren't safe and start using their machines properly, which would mean we would no longer be able to break the codes. So we were forced to run agents who weren't agents, double agents, triple agents, even imaginary agents who made nonexistent trips to England to report on Resistance movements that also didn't exist. This baroque complexity was exciting, in its own way – until agents started to die, because we couldn't tell them about the danger without giving our sources away. Then I wanted to get out.

It was hard to leave. It wasn't because I needed the money: one of my novels had been adapted for the stage, another was being made into a film. It wasn't because I felt the need to 'serve my country', or to fight the evil of Nazi Germany. I wasn't sure enough that my efforts were doing any good. Being a fire warden in London had, it seemed to me, been of more practical use.

However, I did need the distraction. My emotional life was a running sore. I had a wife and children in Oxford, and a mistress in London, a dull, obsessive yet friendly affair which had been going on for some years. I lived in two places, with two sets of warring emotions. The job took me away: writing on its own didn't. Returning to England had renewed the rubbed-raw feelings –

I wanted an end to both marriage and affair. I was eager to escape – into anything.

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It was in this situation that I met Daria. Like Turing's first meeting with the Doctor, it happened in Oxford – but on a very different day. It was June or early July – not long after the D-day landings. Rain was sluicing down, and the air was warm and murky. I had gone home to my family for a weekend, with reluctance because of the feelings this always brought to the surface. I was out walking in the rain, without an umbrella, because, after a strained lunch with my wife and children, I couldn't stand it any longer.

I saw Daria looking at the window of a second-hand bookshop. She had a scarf that fluttered in the wind like a grey flag, and a hat like an inverted saucer. Her long coat blew against her legs, and she was wearing high-heeled shoes. Her lines were perfect: she could have

been designed, complete with her clothes, an artefact from the decade before the war.

I walked up to her, and pretended to admire the books, though in fact the shop didn't interest me, being a repository of ancient Victorian fiction in tatty editions.

It was she who spoke first. 'I have seen your picture,' she said. 'You are the novelist.'

Her accent interested me at once, being like no single European accent I knew. It was as if the tilt and slant on every letter had been taken and averaged by a machine. Her syllables were precise, well considered.

I confessed to being the novelist, and told her about the play and the film.

She looked at me with hooded black eyes and a face that wore a lot of make-up but no expression. 'And where have you been writing your novels most recently, Mr Greene?'

I smiled into that perfect, designed face. 'Colonial police.'

'Yes. I thought that your sun tan might be tropical.'

I hadn't thought I still had a 'sun tan', but I nodded.

'And you are. . . ?' I asked.

'Looking for someone.' She said it with a smile of the sort that indicated I might be the fortunate someone she was seeking. I wasn't fooled, knowing such smiles for what they are.

'I'm just looking for something,' I replied.

She nodded. 'Let's have a drink.'

Daria knew the barman in a small red-brick pub along a side street, and the barman had an old bottle of rum, refilled many times (or so he boasted) from navy rations obtained by his nephew in Plymouth. Daria affected a Continental disdain for his bar chatter, but I could see he wouldn't get that bottle of rum out for just anyone – he was fascinated by her. Almost as fascinated as I.

At that first meeting we discussed books. She was well read and intelligent –

she was familiar with Pound and Walter de la Mare, but had also read J.M.

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Barrie and C.S. Lewis – as well as his well-known religious essay ‘The Allegory of Love’, she was familiar with ‘Out of the Silent Planet’, a science-fiction story he has written of which I was quite unaware. We discussed Lewis’s views on Christianity. I asked Daria if she was a Catholic, but she shook her head. As she did so a curl escaped from the formed mass of her hair, a small beckoning motion that made her seem more human. We didn’t touch. I admired her lines as if she were a sculpture, and she accepted my admiration with just the trace of a smile.

We met again in London the following week, in a cellar bar, and talked of travelling. Daria spoke about Paris as if she knew it well, and we looked forward to its liberation. ‘You must meet me there,’ she said. In return, I told her about Africa, and Mexico, and my other journeys. She listened with an air of total absorption, as if she were recording every word on a tape.

When I came to an end of my narrative, she asked, ‘What’s the strangest thing that ever happened to you?’

I hesitated, thinking about it, turning over various ideas in my mind. It was late: we were in one of those cellar bars so popular in London during the war, where business could carry on under the threat of air raids, and lights could be bright without breaking the blackout regulations. Here, however, the lights were dim, the lamps dressed with small pink shades to give a romantic ambience. There was even some brandy on the table in front of us – another of Daria’s discoveries. Other couples were leaving, perhaps for bed: I couldn’t help looking at the women and comparing them to Daria. Even the slimmest had a greater solidity than she, a fleshiness and reality that she could never possess. I was afraid to touch her, afraid that I would feel only metal and glass.

‘Graham?’

I had been staring: I apologised.

‘The strangest thing. . . ?’ she prompted again.

‘The Doctor, I suppose,’ I said. I felt a tightening in my stomach muscles as I spoke: I suppose you could call it a gut instinct, a sense

that I had done the wrong thing.

Daria, however, showed no particular interest. 'Which doctor?' she asked.

I explained him: his lack of a name, his mysterious appearance, his obsession with what I described as a 'minor border incident' in Africa.

'What incident?'

'There was a light in the sky – something that scared the locals. The French across the border thought we were testing a new weapon, and the Germans sent an SS squad in – I can't think why. I met them in D'nalyel. They terrified 97

me. I suppose I was lucky they didn't kill me. Afterwards the Doctor insisted there was something else to it – something –' I shrugged – 'mystical, I suppose.'

She nodded. 'And do you think there was?'

'No.' I said it without hesitation: it was easy to be rational, three thousand miles away and over a year later. 'I don't know what the natives saw. Maybe it was a weapon. There have been rumours about the Germans.'

'Super-rockets. I have heard of those too. But you said the Doctor was the strange thing.'

I smiled. 'I don't know why I said that. He was an odd man – an ageing fop, stranded in Africa, in a prison cell, with no papers. He – co-opted me, in a way. I got him out of prison, got him some ID, got him back to England. I shouldn't have done it – I had no proof he wasn't working for the Germans. I just believed him – it was almost a religious thing, as if I had to. "The Good Lord's Light in his eyes", and so on.'

Daria laughed. It was unexpected, as if the *Venus de Milo* had smiled. 'He went back to England, then?'

'I don't know. I saw him on to the liner. I never heard from him again.'

'You will,' she said. 'He is the sort of man who returns to haunt you.'

I laughed too. 'I have a feeling that you may be right.' But I didn't

believe her.

Soon after that, she went home – insisted on walking alone. I should have been disappointed; I should have wanted her to come home with me. I did feel a frustration, but it was without either the tenderness or the rawness of passion: it was the frustration of the man who cannot buy the *objet d'art* he would like to possess, or cannot afford the suit he would like to wear. Daria was a woman: but I didn't feel as I should towards a woman. My senses were telling me the truth, but it was a truth I couldn't believe.

When we next met – once again in Oxford – the talk turned, quite early in the evening, to emotional matters. I told her about my wife and my mistress.

I tried to express the rawness of the conflict. Daria listened, as always, as if making a recording, without comment or sympathy.

'You do understand love?' I asked at one point, when she seemed particularly unresponsive.

She nodded. 'The need to make babies is very powerful.'

I was astonished and angry. Her metallic detachment was beginning to seem unnatural. 'It's not just making babies! I've made mine, but I still need –'

'But your mistress you say has not made her babies. This is where the passion and suffering start – also perhaps your guilt.'

I looked at her. She was serious, I think. Her expression was contemplative, her eyes watching me.

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'What Dorothy feels, and what I feel, and what my wife feels has very little to do with "making babies". Sexual relationships have a spiritual aspect –'

'You are sure of that? Is that why you are trying to get into bed with me –'

do you think I'm a spirit?'

I tried to laugh, but the sound died like a fire smothered with too much coal. 'I think you're an –' I was going to say 'attractive woman'

but stopped and decided to be honest. 'I'm not sure I want to go to bed with you.'

'Good,' she said. 'You wouldn't enjoy it. Others haven't.'

I looked in her face for a trace of the hurt that might drive such a bare statement, but I could see nothing other than that recording, weighing intelligence.

'What do you do?' I asked her.

She smiled. 'I have told you before, but you didn't listen then and you're not listening now.' She made a dramatic pause, with the perfect timing of a professional actress. 'I am looking for someone.'

'That can't be what you do all the time.'

'It's what I am, Graham. The woman who is looking for someone.'

'What happens if you find him?'

'I'll have to be someone else. Or nothing at all.'

I misunderstood her meaning. I didn't think she was literally looking for anyone, sexually or otherwise: I thought she was talking in metaphor. Expressing, perhaps, a spiritual longing. My mistake was to cost a great deal.

Two months passed, and I didn't hear from Daria, though she had my London address. The telephone number she'd given me was never answered, and the address was a bomb site. I thought that she might have been killed – this was the time of the V-1s and V-2s, of unpredictable death. My boss at Military Intelligence, Kim Philby, suggested an alternative – that she might have been working for someone, trying to turn me or recruit me.

'The Russians?' I hazarded.

He smiled. 'Why the Russians? She sounds Bulgarian to me.'

We both laughed: the ineptness of the Bulgarian Service was famous. He offered to trace her using the Service, but I refused: he may have done it anyway. I heard nothing more about it. I attempted to forget about Daria, with some success, though I would see the line, the form of her in cars from the previous decade, in the architecture of a tube station or the Hammersmith Odeon. She would appear as part of the

design, formed by the other lines, and then the perspective would change and I would see it was just an illusion, an ordinary woman. In those hidden moments in the last year of the war I came to appreciate some of the glamour and obsession that surrounded things that were, or claimed to be, beyond the merely human.

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Then three things happened at once. Philby received news of the new, bizarre code from Dresden that the people at Bletchley couldn't break. The Doctor turned up, again in prison, involved with Turing and the Dresden code, and asking for me. And on the same day, a note arrived from Daria, recalling our conversations about travel, and asking me to meet her in liberated Paris.

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Chapter Thirteen

I first went to Cromerton in Surrey, where they were holding the Doctor. It was a war-built compound: low whitewashed concrete buildings surrounded by high fences. There was barbed wire by the mile, and an air of tense efficiency.

A red-and-black notice told me this was a TOP-SECURITY ESTABLISHMENT.

Inside, it was no more or less than a prison. Miles of dark linoleum, windows with black roller blinds permanently drawn. I found the Doctor in a small cell with no window and no radiator. It was cold, but otherwise very like his cell in Sierra Leone. It too smelled of bad food and stale urine. The Doctor was wearing a green velvet jacket over his white shirt, and his shoes had been removed, but otherwise he was dressed as he had been the last time I had seen him, and his hair was just as long, as foppish and inappropriate in England as it had been in Africa.

'I see that your dress sense hasn't improved,' I told him.

He grinned. 'Not in a hundred years! I've been wearing clothes like these whenever I can for as long as I can remember. Just say they're a part of me.

Now, what can I do for you?'

'I think it's more a case of what I can do for you.'

He stared at me. 'What do you think? Let me find them. I couldn't get back into Germany, and then there was something else I needed to take care of: I've lost a great deal of time already.'

I had expected something of the sort, and had an answer ready. 'It's not that simple. You must be aware of –'

'You didn't tell me they sang.'

It was true: I hadn't. I'd assumed that he was the expert, that he would know.

'You never asked me, I said.

He nodded. 'I wouldn't have known what it meant. Turing didn't, even after he heard it on the recording. But I know.' He looked up. 'You are going to let me out of here?' His expression was rather like that of a cat begging for food.

'It depends what you're going to do. At the moment you're under arrest for treason.' I resisted the temptation to add, 'again'.

'Hmm.' He appeared to be considering the problem, as if it were of a scientific nature and subject to a rational solution.

'Perhaps if you could tell me why you're so interested in this German code?'

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'Oh, for heaven's sake! It's not German, and I'm not interested in the code.

I'm interested in the makers of the code, who are the same people you met in Africa but they're wearing German uniforms, or possibly other uniforms, by now, but most likely German because that's where they are, and we need to find out who and how and why they're here and what to do about it and we'll have to do it soon because they're sending that message to someone, aren't they? And they've got a reason for doing it and they may be expecting a reply or even a visit, so now will you let me *out of here*?'

He finished the speech with his hands on my shoulders and his face about three inches from mine.

'This isn't Africa, Doctor. As you've discovered, you can't just sneak

across the border here. Nor can I spring suspicious bodies from prison without the necessary authority.'

I knew this was lame reasoning – and the Doctor gave me a look to show he was aware of its crippled state.

In an attempt to heal it, I added, 'I'm leaving the Service – officially, I've left.' It wasn't quite true: Philby had refused to accept my resignation. But I was determined to escape as soon as possible, nonetheless.

The Doctor remained silent.

'All right. I have to go to Paris. There's a woman –'

He laughed, then. Laughed and laughed and laughed. Then sobered up, very quickly, as if he had thought of something. 'This woman,' he said. 'What is she like?'

I hesitated, then told him. Before I had half finished, he said, 'And you never noticed?'

'Noticed what?' But I knew, from the expression on his face. It should have been obvious – was obvious. But I hadn't noticed. No wonder I had been afraid to touch her. The melted remains at Markebo returned to my mind, the screams of the SS men, the bloodless trail in the bushes. The prison cell felt chillier: I felt a claustrophobic fear, looking at the bare brick walls.

'I think I should come to Paris with you,' said the Doctor.

I shrugged. 'All right, I'll let you out. But if there's to be any chance of getting you overseas I'll have to think of a damn good excuse.'

He said nothing. I turned and faced away from him, looking at the blank door of the cell. 'Listen,' I said. 'You were a pupil of the German mathematician, David Hilbert. An English colonial – Canada, perhaps?' I looked at him for a moment. 'Mmm – no, Indian Civil Service. Turing's father was ICS. So –'

you lost your passport when you had to leave Germany abruptly at the out-break of war and have found it difficult ever since. You knew of Turing's work and guessed that he would be working on secret codes. You wanted to help

him because you haven't been able to help against Hitler in any other

way and thought your German mathematical training might help. Do you understand?’

‘Perfectly. And a very good lot of nonsense it is, too. I can see why you’re a fine novelist.’

I turned to face him. ‘This isn’t a game, Doctor. I’m an author, but I’m also a secret agent. I think it’s a farce, most of the time, but people keep getting killed. That’s not funny.’

‘It isn’t,’ he agreed. He stared at the dirty floor of the cell, his face full of shadows. ‘It’s called war. And we might be fighting more than one of them.’

I didn’t know whether he meant more than one enemy, or more than one war. I didn’t think to ask.

By the time I reported back to Philby, I had thought of some more lies to go with the first one.

‘I think the best thing would be to take the Doctor to Paris,’ I told him. ‘If he’s working for the Germans – or anyone else – there’s a good chance he’ll try to get in touch, or even get away. If he isn’t – or if he’s come over to our side – he’ll be just as much use there as here, and I can keep him away from anything he doesn’t need to know about.’

Philby agreed with my reasoning. I told him nothing about the note written on soft yellowing paper which I had hidden in the inner pocket of my jacket.

I didn’t want a posse of agents following me in search of *la femme fatale*.

I felt a sense of liberation: for the first time in the war (indeed since some time before it) I felt I had control over my destiny. Like most people with such feelings, I had overlooked the fact that my decision was driven by a mixture of pride and sexual frustration, and that I had liberated no one, least of all myself.

The first sign that I wasn’t in control of the operation came the next day, when I visited the Doctor’s cell again to inform him of the arrangements. He nodded and thanked me, but gave no sign of the sort of childish excitement that Turing relates – perhaps he knew it wouldn’t work with me. Instead he adopted a businesslike tone.

‘Turing will have to come, you know,’ he said.

‘Turing! I don’t think we’ll need –’

‘Yes, we will. He’s the expert on German codes. He has to translate for me.’

‘From German? I think my German’s probably better than –’

‘No, into your language.’

I was confused. ‘Translate what, then?’

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‘Whatever I find out. It’s unlikely you’ll understand the primary concepts –

I’m not sure that they will be translatable, even by Turing, but at least there’s a chance –’

‘I don’t know what you’re talking about, Doctor. The idea’s ridiculous. Turing’s a first-class security risk. You know he’s homosexual, don’t you?’ I could have added that he was insensitive and immature, but I didn’t want to offend the Doctor. ‘Let him loose in Paris, knowing what he knows? I might as well parachute him into Berlin with a decoding machine strapped around his neck.’

The Doctor, however, was determined. ‘We will need Turing,’ he said. ‘Take it from me. And the fact that he’s homosexual should have nothing to do with it. You have some extraordinary prejudices.’

‘Doctor, he could prejudice our security. He’s a weakness.’

‘He’s a person, and with a deeper sense of loyalty than yours, I suspect.’

A child, I thought. A child in mathematician’s clothing.

We discussed it some more, but it was clear that the Doctor wasn’t about to go to Paris without Turing. It was a straightforward blackmail: either I went on my own, knowing what I now knew about Daria, or I agreed to his request. With any other man there would have been a way in, an appeal to his self-interest perhaps: but the Doctor, once he had decided, was not open to appeals of any kind. I gave in, but not only out of my self-interest. I wanted to see them compete, the Doctor and Daria. I wanted to know which one was the good angel and which the bad.

I should, of course, have known that there are no simple answers to questions like that.

Turing has described his feelings on those days in Paris as being like those of Alice in Wonderland. It's not a bad description. What he doesn't seem to have noticed is that I felt the same. It was a game where I couldn't trust anyone, and in this it was like the ordinary run of Intelligence operations: what was different was the oddness of the players. Turing, for all his weaknesses, was a more or less known quantity, but the Doctor certainly wasn't; neither was Daria, and our quarry – the Dresden code makers – also had an air of the unknowable about them. All were capable of miracles, and all were capable of killing.

Furthermore I was unsure about my new colleague, Colonel Elgar. When I saw him at the airstrip, I knew at once that there was something fake about him. It wasn't anything that I could have proved by looking at his papers, or by asking Philby to check his record. It was his manner that gave it away.

He didn't look like other Resistance fighters, and I had spoken with several.

He didn't have the right kind of desperation, the twitchy sixth sense that a man has to develop if he lives under occupation, in continual fear of a knock 104

on the door or the treachery of a friend. His manner was more that of an actor playing the part of a British undercover man in one of those second-rate propaganda movies where everything goes well, and if anyone 'buys it' they are buried with such honour that their death can't possibly matter.

Nonetheless I was forced to work with him. I was in the same dilemma as Turing: he was an accredited officer, and as such was in charge of the operation. I was an amateur who had already offered his resignation, a fact of which Elgar was aware.

Elgar was aware of altogether too much – that was another worrying thing about him. On that first night – whilst Turing was agonising about whether to allow the Doctor access to the code – I was being interrogated about the Doctor by Elgar, as we drank together in my hotel room.

I stuck to the cover story, but Elgar snorted and said, 'Are you sure that he's a colonial? How can you be sure of a thing like that, without

any papers? And this guff about loss of memory! We're letting the man work with one of the most important code breakers we have.'

'Bringing Turing was the Doctor's idea, not mine.'

'Precisely, old chap.' Elgar's eyes were cold, far colder than his words. I knew then that they were the eyes of a killer.

'In the Resistance, you must have taken people on trust sometimes.'

'No. Never.'

I was sure he was wrong about the Doctor, but couldn't think of any more adequate argument. I felt disturbed by the easy hatred in him, and I wanted to get away. I made the drink my excuse, and told him that I needed to sleep.

As soon as he was gone, I went to reception and telephoned Daria. 'I'm here.'

'It's the middle of the night!' But she didn't sound sleepy. I thought she might have company, but when I told her where I was she said, 'I'll come over now.'

I should have felt a surge of sexual desire at this proposition, but all I felt was anxiety. The thought of her coming to my room, with Elgar in the next room on one side and the Doctor on the other, might in other circumstances have given me the added thrill of danger, but the Doctor's insight into her nature had made me wary. Legends of the succubus tumbled around in my mind like worms. 'We should meet outside,' I said.

A hesitation, then, 'Very well. That may be safer.'

We agreed to meet in a café near the hotel. She kissed me, for the first time, and with a human urgency that should have been convincing. I, however, was uncertain enough to pull back.

She asked why. When I couldn't come up with an answer, she frowned at me and asked, 'Is it anything to do with the Doctor?'

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I felt that wrench in my stomach that was far too familiar in Intelligence work. There was no way that Daria could know that the Doctor was with me, except through a spy. When I tasked her with

this, she said simply, 'I know Elgar.'

Her eyes were dark and haunted across the café table, implying that the relationship was anything but straightforward. Despite this I could hardly fail to detect the conspiracy: her invitation, Elgar's presence in Paris, her curiosity about the Doctor. How much did they know? Who were they? The Alice-in-Wonderland feeling that Turing describes so well came to me then, with the additional fear of betrayal and death.

I stood up. 'You should meet the Doctor. He'll still be up, probably. I'd like to see you two discuss –' I was going to say 'who you are', but then realised it was hard to say what they would discuss. Certainly it was not likely to be anything I would understand, or want to hear. Perhaps they would try to kill each other.

Daria stood up too. 'I don't know,' she said. 'I may need –'

'Backup?'

She shrugged. 'You are misunderstanding the situation, Graham. You are thinking in the clichés of the world in which you live. There is no need to feel threatened, because there is no threat.'

I left the café. Despite her words, I was afraid. She followed me and caught my arm. Even through the thick cloth of my coat, her touch was cold and angular. I was now certain that I didn't want her to come to the hotel – not tonight, perhaps never.

'Perhaps we should wait until the morning,' I suggested as we rounded the corner into the Rue du Parc.

'I will look from outside,' she said. 'I will speak to Elgar soon, but not tonight.' Again, the hint that things were not easy between them – which made her seem more human.

As we approached the hotel, she stopped and gave a small cry, then pulled me into a darkened doorway. I looked up and saw the Doctor with Turing on a balcony, lit from behind by the dim light from the room. I'm not surprised by Turing's account of their conversation, for I will swear that Daria and the Doctor exchanged a glance of pure recognition before she strode away down the street, her heels clicking on the stone.

I don't know whether it was the next day or the day after that when my uncertainty about Elgar precipitated into a knowledge that he was kin to the Doctor and Daria. I had begun, perhaps, to be sensitive to

the nuances of wrongness in language, the overcooked logic, the lack of the usual human 106

perceptions, which would occasionally show, like the crack in a mask that reveals the ancient flesh beneath.

There was only one person I could tell about my new insight. I found the Doctor in Turing's room. Turing, fortunately, was out, taking his ideas for a walk. The Doctor was staring at one of the many newspaper-sized sheets of coding material, a pencil tucked behind one ear and a pen in each hand.

'I know,' said the Doctor, when I told him about Elgar, with a look of wisdom and prescience that I found more than slightly irritating.

'Then you could have told me,' I pointed out.

'I didn't want to, or need to. You knew he was working with Daria.'

'I thought he was *sleeping* with Daria.'

The Doctor laughed. 'He might be. But that proves nothing about him, since you would also like to.' He glanced up. 'I don't recommend it, by the way.'

'You've tried?' I asked dryly.

'We – I –' He shrugged. 'It's not something that interests me.'

'Sex?'

'Yes. It's a missing piece in my life.' He scribbled something on one of the sheets of paper, left-handed.

'A crack in the mask,' I said, thinking of Elgar.

He made another note on the code sheets, this time with his right hand.

'Whatever. Anyway, as I say, I don't recommend it.'

The Doctor's rejection had the perverse effect of awakening a spark of interest in me. Perhaps he intended this, though I doubt he was that devious.

'Do you think I am human?' he asked.

There wasn't an answer to this: I hedged with a generality. 'My mind accepts the possible, Doctor. With room for a few miracles.'

'Hmm. And not much in between.' He was disappointed: I could tell from his voice. But how could I make a judgement on his humanity or otherwise? I wanted to leave, but he spoke again. 'If you keep an open mind, and expand your definition of what is possible, eventually what you originally thought of as miracles will become part of the possible. Yes?'

I reviewed this one to make sure he was saying what I thought he was saying, then replied, 'I prefer miracles to remain miracles, thank you, Doctor.'

He wrote with both hands at once, furiously, for about half a minute.

'Maybe you're right,' he said, when he'd finished.

I turned to leave. 'Thanks for the tip. I'll be careful with Daria.'

The Doctor didn't reply, and I was halfway through the door when he said,

'Do you believe in evil?'

I had been asked this question enough times to have a reply ready. 'I'd be a fool if I didn't.'

'Do you believe that people can be evil? I mean, entirely evil?'

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I shook my head. 'Sorry, Doctor. I'd have to write a novel to answer that one.'

'So Herr Hitler, for example –'

'Is evil enough that he has to be stopped.' I'd been asked that one a good many times, too.

'By killing him?'

'If necessary, yes.'

'Would you do it?'

He had stopped looking at the code sheets, and was staring up at me,

solemn, troubled. I looked him in the eyes. 'Would you?'

He nodded, then shook his head, a very human gesture of confusion. 'I've had to be absolved –' He shrugged, looked back to the code sheets. I noticed there was a clock in the room, elaborate ormolu, ticking quietly. It looked original, and expensive. Surely it wasn't a standard hotel fitting.

The Doctor wasn't working at all now: he was just staring at the sheets of paper. The light from the window caught his jacket and the fall of his long curls: he could have been a statue.

'Can I help?' I asked after a while.

'With this? No. But there is a favour you could do for me.'

'Yes?'

'You could take this –' he gestured at something that looked like a wind-up gramophone, with the old type of brass speaker horn – 'and put it in Elgar's room for me. I want to monitor his movements.'

'What on Earth for? And anyway he's going to notice that.'

'Hmm. Yes, you're right.' The Doctor had, to all appearances, not appreciated this point: he lifted up the machine, shook it, muttered, 'Maybe we could take the horn off –'

'What is it for? It looks like a gramophone to me.'

'Looks like. That's why I thought maybe –' He shrugged. 'Not contemporary?'

'Not exactly. Where did you get it? A junk shop?'

'Sort of. I think so.' He grinned. 'Oh, well. Perhaps this instead.' He lifted the arm and needle from the gramophone. They came away at the mount with a click rather too like that of the safety catch on a gun. He handed the detached arm to me. 'Behind a curtain?'

I took the strange, curved tube. The metal was cold, and the needle glittered. Detached from the turntable it seemed a different, more alien, object.

'How does it work?' I asked. I knew that I wouldn't understand the answer, and I didn't. The Doctor talked about statistics, and quantum interference patterns. Turing would have understood, perhaps.

Understanding nothing, I placed the object in Elgar's room at the next opportunity. I played the spy very well, considering how little practice I'd had at being an agent, rather than merely controlling other men. I found it was like the difference between writing about a life and living it. I went in with the strange object under my jacket, horribly obvious and bulky. I felt Elgar's eyes on me, felt that he must see that I was guilty, burdened, suddenly a double agent. I sat down on the big honeymooners' bed with its thick pink velveteen counterpane, and talked to Elgar about the Doctor's (imaginary) report on his progress with the code. I waited until Elgar's back was turned, then placed the object on the floor behind the draped-down cover, with as much finesse as a schoolboy stealing apples. I was very proud of myself when Elgar didn't notice.

Chapter Fourteen

Later that evening, Daria called at the hotel reception desk and asked for me.

I came down to find her leaning on the polished marble, as elegant as a film star, with a long cigarette in a holder in her mouth. She was sexy – very much so. So much so that I was ready to forget everything I knew about her when she said, 'Come with me to Elgar's room.'

'Elgar's room?' I repeated, with the inanity of a sex-stunned teenager.

'He won't be there.' She smiled. 'There is a kind of loneliness, you know. . . '

I don't know whether she was lonely. I don't know what her motives were.

I know that I wanted her then, in the sexual way that I hadn't wanted her before. I couldn't forget the cautions – hers and my own as well as the Doctor's – but there was also a curious sense of excitement, as if by touching her intimately I would be touching her otherness.

In the room, we talked for a long time. My mouth was dry with a fascination I hadn't felt since the age of nineteen, when I flirted with my younger siblings'

nanny at my parents' house. These feelings of calf love returned to me

in maturity with a strange intensity. In the moment, which in due course came, when I reached out and touched her cool body, all my doubts vanished and all I felt was a passion beyond any I had felt before. My wife, my mistress Dorothy, the 'jig-jig' girls in Sierra Leone – always there had been a nagging humanness to the relation, a fear of hurting and being hurt, an awkwardness to the moment of climax, and before, and after. Here there was nothing but the heat of desire, the searing pain of climax, and the afterglow. Sex with Daria was a gorgeous cliché.

In the darkness afterwards, I began to realise that. She was quiet, smoking a cigarette as a woman in a film might afterwards, to indicate the success of passion without the necessity of portraying it.

'What now?' I said.

I could sense her sensing my doubts. 'You know Elgar is one of us?'

'Yes,' I said. 'And the Doctor.'

'No, not the Doctor.'

There was a silence. 'How do you know that?'

'Elgar wants me to spy on you. To take advantage of my female form. I think his strategy is wrong.'

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It was an odd way to describe her body: 'female form'. But if she were –

No. I couldn't think about what she might be. The whispering of wings was too loud.

The next day was the day Turing overheard Daria lying to Elgar in the café: telling him that she'd found out what she already knew. She did it, I think, because she wanted to see me again, and she would need Elgar's blessing for that. Though whether it was the meeting of bodies, or of minds, or of souls that she sought, I don't know. Perhaps I flatter myself. Perhaps her motives were more complex and less subject to human understanding. Whatever the reason, we spent another night in Elgar's room. The passion was the same, only this time it went on for longer, and afterwards I slept in the bed with her.

I woke at dawn, with the feeling that I had suffered a bad dream,

though I couldn't remember it. The bed next to me was empty, but there was shadow in the room, and movement. I heard Daria catch her breath, and I opened my eyes. She was crouching beside the bed, her hands underneath the draped-down covers, scrabbling at something on the floor.

'No!' I told her.

You will not believe it, but I had forgotten the Doctor's 'surveillance device': I had associated it with Elgar, not with Daria and passion. Now she stood up, holding it in both hands, staring with a fixation that was not human. Her neck and back curved like the architecture of a machine. She didn't speak, didn't explain, not that I could have hoped to understand the explanation. I reached out towards her, then saw that the sheets were smouldering where they touched her body.

I was up, out of the bed, heading for the door. 'I'll get help.'

'Go.' Her voice was without human intonation, the voice a machine might use. 'Save your life.' Her body was hot enough now that I could see the heat shimmering up from it. The skin was browning, like paper before it catches fire.

'I'll get Elgar.' Though I had no idea where he was.

She moved with a sudden ferocity, straight towards me. Though I am certain her body was not glowing from the heat, and retained its human shape, in my memory it is white, shining, and almost without form. She pushed me out through the door and slammed it shut behind me.

A moment later, she began to scream. Naked, I hammered at the door, until I felt a hand on my shoulder.

It was the Doctor. He pushed me away, his face contorted with a strong emotion. 'Go away! This is not what I meant –'

'You've killed her!' I shouted. She was still screaming, an inhuman sound. I ran down the stairs, with the intention of finding Elgar. I ended up stammer-112

ing at the bewildered commissioner, still stark naked, whilst upstairs Daria died.

Someone lent me a dressing gown, and I stood outside for half an hour, shivering. My skin was scalded where she had touched me, as if

I had splashed boiling water over it. It hurt, though not enough to stop me thinking. I looked for Elgar first, but he was nowhere in sight. I saw Turing, but he didn't see me, and I couldn't be bothered to talk to him.

In the end, I had an inspiration and telephoned from a café the number that Daria had given me for her *apartement*. Elgar answered the phone. I told him what had happened in his room. There was a long silence, then his cold voice said, 'She's irreplaceable.' The syllables echoed over the phone line, as if it were long-distance, though Daria had told me that she lived in the Montmartre district of Paris.

He asked me where I was, and what had happened. I told him. He asked no questions, not even when I told him about the Doctor's 'surveillance' device.

When I had finished he said, 'I knew the Doctor was our enemy. I had hoped better of you.'

I felt then that jolt in the stomach so beloved of cheap thrillers. It must have seemed obvious to you, reading about it, but for me as I lived through it, the full truth hit me only then: I had killed Daria. I had been a cause of her death, no less the Doctor's instrument than that strange piece of metal he had given me. I tried not to be sure. I tried to tell myself that it had been an accident, that the Doctor hadn't intended to kill anyone. I didn't believe myself.

'Greene?' Elgar's voice. I felt the phone against my ear, and realised I'd had it pressed against the lobe for some time, but hadn't spoken.

'I'm still here. I – don't know –'

'Look, I'm sorry. It wasn't your fault – you couldn't have known. We'd better abort the operation here. Get Turing back to England. I'll deal with the Doctor.'

Then I'm going to Dresden. I have to meet the enemy before they strike again.'

In different circumstances the clichéd lines would have made me laugh, especially since the idea of Elgar's going to Dresden seemed inadvisable, even ridiculous. In the face of Daria's death, I was only reminded that human beings do not speak in B-movie clichés, and that Elgar could not, therefore, be human. Yet he was giving me good advice: get out now, while you can.

And he had provided an excuse, in the form of Turing. His actions did not lack sophistication, appealing as they did to my interests as well as his own. They were merely subtly unreal, like those of a character in a bad novel.

I walked back to the hotel, in a state of shock. It was noon, but it was half dark, and I think it was drizzling. I remembered Daria: I remembered the tone of her voice, the shape of her face, the faint trace of something truly human 113

struggling to escape from whatever she was. Was I only imagining that, now that she was dead, or had I always seen it? I tried to remember where and when I had thought of her as human, but could remember only the instances of her non-humanness.

Once I had dressed, I established that the Doctor was gone from the hotel –

hardly a surprise. I couldn't bring myself to speak to Turing: his lack of reaction would have made me too angry to do my duty. I merely arranged for him to be sent home in the morning, and left the hotel for the Bordelaire base.

I didn't know where the Doctor had gone, but it wasn't difficult to guess where he would try to go. Standing in the driveway of the base, pushed and shoved by young American Marines setting out on a mission to the front line, I knew that the climax of the action would have to be in Dresden – it was much like the sense I might have about the direction of a novel, and had the same tedious inevitability. Unlike Turing I had no sense of adventure at this point. His naïve acceptance of the Doctor is typical of his light and thoughtless attitude to his life – he appears in his passion and delight to have forgotten to give the proper emotional weight to the fact that the man might be a murderer.

I couldn't forget that, nor could I forget that Elgar might be just as suspect. I had no intention of giving myself to Elgar's sway in the way that I had given in to the Doctor's. If anything was clear after Dana's death, it was that none of the strangers could be trusted, that any of them might kill, and that they were not afraid to use those of us who were merely human as their agents.

It wasn't difficult to persuade Philby that I should go with Elgar. My superior was, I think, as uncertain about the colonel as I, and more than willing to take my word for it that he shouldn't be trusted. I don't

know why, but Philby suspected everyone of playing a double game. That the Doctor had vanished helped my case: we both agreed he could be anywhere, doing anything, and that he certainly couldn't be trusted. I didn't tell Philby about Daria, of course, nor did I mention the Doctor's 'surveillance device' that had killed her. How could I? And the Doctor had intended this, I'm sure of it.

I expected Elgar to have objections – why should he want my company?

After I had planted the Doctor's device in his room, I could hardly expect him to trust me. But, to my surprise, he agreed to it at once. In his rather artificial way he even greeted the plan with enthusiasm: 'I will need help, as a matter of fact. But you must stick with me, and do exactly as I say. And if we meet the Doctor – leave him to me.'

I knew what this meant, but was hardly in a position to argue. It occurred to me that Elgar wanted my company only to make sure I didn't fall in with the Doctor again. Given what happened to Turing, I can see that he was quite right to be concerned about this.

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The chief problem with the German mission was my barely adequate German. I had once, many years ago when Germany was seen as the victim of the unfair Versailles agreement, proposed to be an agent for German interests.

The plan had come to nothing, but I had attempted to learn the language.

The smattering of accented German with which this had left me, though good enough to make myself understood and quite good enough to understand Hitler's speeches on the radio, was nowhere near good enough for me to pass as a German. So it was proposed that I pose as an English POW, and that Elgar, whose German was idiomatic and unaccented, should play my captor.

All this was logical and sensible, yet on my first sight of Elgar as a policeman, I was sure I had made a mistake. The grey-and-black German uniform became a part of him as soon as he put it on. Elgar became a German – a committed Nazi. The moustache had gone. His face lost its twinkling English chubbiness and gained a pig-eyed, flabby sense of evil that was cheeks and eyes leery, as if they had spent the night in a house with ghosts.

I expected to be killed, but Elgar expected to be in control. He showed no fear. The car was German: he was wearing his uniform. He bullied the Germans. He didn't shout, but his voice and face were icy and barely controlled as he told our cover story. His fierce tone, his visible anger, the almost suppressed twitching of a muscle in his cheek, all contrived to give the impression that he might shoot one of them at any moment for having the insolence to have stopped us. He marched back and forth, and his heels crunched on the road with the exact rhythm of a metronome. The officer leading the patrol –

a boy of perhaps twenty-two – became desperate and confused. At the beginning when Elgar told our story I could see an intelligent suspicion in his face: he wanted to argue his case with this insane officer. But the metronome motion of Elgar's boots wouldn't allow it. Not only did the young officer have to believe our cover story, but was forced to allow us to siphon precious fuel into the car from one of his vehicles – Elgar said he needed enough to reach Stuttgart.

Afterwards, Elgar said nothing about the closeness of our escape. He didn't whoop with joy. He didn't smile. He drove on, his heavy hands attached to the wheel of the German car, his eyes on the road and his face without expression.

I asked if he was pleased with having got hold of the extra fuel. He nodded once, a twitch of the neck, and said it would save time.

We were descending into the Rhine valley, heading for one of the few bridges that remained intact after the Allied bombing. The sky was growing dark, and a silver-blue light was creeping up the vineyard slopes, reflected from the water. The rows of vines curled like the whorls of a fingerprint.

Houses hunkered on the brown soil like black beetles.

I told Elgar about my first visit to the Rhineland – my abortive attempt to 115

become a German agent.

'How could you consider changing your duty like that?'

'Changing my duty?'

'Your duty was to be English, and to support the English. How could you think of supporting the Germans?'

I felt again that cold shiver inside my gut that is supposed to happen only in second-rate thrillers. Elgar's remarks made no sense. What had the Doctor said about his having to 'translate the concepts'? I'd thought he was talking about higher mathematics. Perhaps he had been talking about morality

'Are you human?' I asked Elgar.

Elgar laughed. 'You could say it's my duty to be human. Just as it's yours to be English. Fortunately, our duties happen to coincide.'

The answer didn't make me feel any better, but I had to shut up then as we were approaching the Rhine, and there was traffic ahead of us, a row of dark military trucks, unlit, grunting like hippos at a watering hole. It looked as if an entire German division, or the remains of one, was trying to cross the Rhine – this was one of the few remaining bridges.

Elgar bullied his way through the traffic. Once he drew his revolver and pointed it at a stubborn, angry German officer. I couldn't see the German's face in the darkness: he looked inhuman, an empty uniform with silver trim glinting like small lights. I was more afraid of Elgar than the officer – I thought he might shoot the German. However the bluff worked and the officer backed down. We crossed the bridge in darkness, with the hooded lights of trucks behind and ahead of us. Steel rails passed on either side, and water glimmered below. There was the rumble of engines and the irregular dull chime of steel plates moving underneath the heavy vehicles.

We were almost at the German side when the convoy halted. We were told to turn lights and engines off: it was clear that the Germans were expecting a raid. The silence seemed to go on for ever. I could hear the faint chuckling of water beneath us, the tick of cooling metal, Elgar's breathing. I would like to say that I prayed, but no words came to me, nor even an image of God.

Instead, absurdly, I saw an image of the Doctor. At the time it seemed like blasphemy, but in retrospect I think it more likely to have been a premonition.

The minutes passed. Elgar said, 'They should go on. There won't be a raid.'

It was true that, in Paris, we had been assured that the bridge wouldn't be bombed tonight, but I had little faith in that promise. The war couldn't be held up for a two-man mission, however important it was perceived to be –

and I knew too well the difficulties of communications. I doubted that anyone had told the air forces about us, or that they'd listened if anyone had.

I had more faith in the protection of the clouds, but that was erratic. At one moment I would see a ragged patch of stars overhead, then it would vanish.

There was a brief, bright light that may have come from the moon through another gap in the clouds, or may have been a bomber's flare. After around half an hour, I began to think that the clouds would after all be enough to protect us. Ice had started to form on the windscreen. I looked around for something to scrape it off, but Elgar told me not to worry. 'I can see all right,'

he said.

A few minutes later the all-clear was given and the convoy crawled on, in almost total darkness. The ice on the windscreen slowly melted – until it was gone, Elgar drove blind. By then we were off the bridge, driving quickly along a darkened road, away from the German division and towards Dresden. I don't know how Elgar steered the car: even with the windscreen clear, I could see little in the darkness.

I asked him if he planned to stop for the night. 'Not yet,' he said. 'We'll drive whilst we have the fuel and the roads are clear. Sleep if you need to.'

I did sleep, a few half-dozing moments, jolted by the car, watching the faint shuttered lights glancing off shapes that might have been walls or fences or trees. A ghostly figure in front of us: was it a man? Had we run him over? I felt no impact. An optical illusion?

When I woke, it was daylight – bright, low, winter sunshine. I was surprised and disconcerted by how the territory of Germany – enemy territory – looked like home. For five years I had lived with the image of a darkened country, ruled by the foaming proclamations of the almost-mad Führer. Instead I saw an ordered countryside, the fields dull with frost, stacks of firewood outside the houses. Children marched along the side of the road with school books under their arms – they even waved at the passing car. It could have been a

country at peace. It was almost possible to believe the Nazi propagandists 117

who told the world that the war was far from over, that Germany might yet survive.

Then we reached the outskirts of Stuttgart, and were caught in a confused skirling of soldiers, dray horses, battered army vehicles, and hundreds – perhaps thousands – of dispossessed civilians on foot. We were fast running out of fuel. Elgar attempted to requisition some more: I remember a small German officer at the iron gates of what must have been a supply depot. He was a man with a feminine face, still a little chubby despite the hardship around him. I thought of a cupid in uniform, with a sidearm to replace his bow and arrow. The image lacked humour.

‘We have no fuel here and we have lives to save!’ he bellowed. ‘These people –’ he waved at the road behind us – ‘they must be kept moving – we must get them to Ludwigsberg today!’

This seemed an ambition unlikely to be fulfilled. It was already almost eleven and would be dark by five. We had passed through Ludwigsberg – it was some eight miles to the north, and the road was muddy and crowded. The people around us looked tired and hungry, all wearing the ageless, despairing look of the refugee on their faces. They carried old suitcases, cloth bundles, baskets, kettles, anything they could carry. One man with a pale, spotted face, perhaps sixty years old, towed a bright steel trunk on wheels. He was injured, a bandage around his arm, stained with what could have been dirt or blood.

We passed a young woman wearing a red headscarf and singing a jaunty marching tune, but the cheerful look on her face was forced and angular, and the sound soaked away into the leaden atmosphere without making an impression. It was freezing cold.

Elgar drove through them, past them, searching for another source of fuel that he could requisition.

‘We should dump the car and go by train,’ I said. ‘We have the papers. It’s going to be safer than begging for fuel.’

‘Leave that decision to me,’ said Elgar, without taking his eyes off the road.

Near the station was a larger depot. Fuel tankers were lined up inside:

ten, perhaps fifteen of them. Elgar almost drove through the barrier without stopping. He made his usual attempt to bully the officers at the gate, but this time the response was different. The man was tall, a classic Aryan with blond hair and intelligent blue eyes. He demanded to see our papers. Elgar told our cover story. The officer asked us to get out of the car. He didn't seem to be suspicious, but I knew that he was. He was too calm. For the third time in twenty-four hours I felt in imminent danger of death. Capture and torture, accompanied by the betrayal of my colleagues, didn't seem a very dignified way of dying. I had a cyanide capsule in my pocket, but I wasn't sure I could get to it in time.

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'We should go,' I murmured to Elgar.

Elgar frowned. I could see him hesitate, his face working as if thousands of small wheels and levers were turning behind it. Then he banged the car into reverse and roared out on to the street. I heard shouts. I didn't hear a gunshot but something hit the car. It could have been a stone.

We made a sudden turn across the road. I saw a woman in front of us, staring like a frightened animal. She didn't move, and Elgar was forced to stop. He waved her out the way, a vicious expression on his face. She turned, and I saw how thin her body was, and the dirt on her clothing. I can recall no expression on her face, I can't see her features. The car body rang with impact again, we started to move, the woman was still in the way and was brushed aside. I saw her fall.

Then we were moving down a side road, narrow, cobbled, framed by brick warehouses. The windows were broken, some of them boarded up. I could smell the residue of smoke in the air. The road ended, after perhaps a half mile, in a brick wall, and Elgar pulled up smoothly. We got out of the car – the air was shockingly cold. Elgar put the pack containing our remaining rations, fake papers and so forth on to his back. We began walking along a narrow alleyway. Outside the car, the smell of smoke and dust was stronger.

'Did we hurt that woman?' I asked him.

'What woman?'

'You must have noticed. We hit her.'

'I couldn't avoid her. We had to get away.'

‘You make it sound as if it doesn’t matter.’

‘It doesn’t. Getting to Dresden is all that matters.’

I glanced at him. ‘Don’t lose your humanity, Elgar. That’s playing their game for them.’

‘I thought you believed I wasn’t human.’

‘It shouldn’t make any difference. Anyway, it’s the Doctor who thinks in terms of human and not-human. I think in terms of souls.’ I was lying.

‘Like the priest?’

I hesitated, confused.

‘We don’t lose our memories,’ he said. ‘All of us carry them.’

I didn’t know what he meant, perhaps didn’t want to know, so I retreated into silence. We crossed a bridge over a canal. The path along the water was blocked by rubble from a warehouse which had been destroyed only a few hundred yards away. The bridge ended in a damaged street where there had been shops. Now there was a landscape of narrow houses, nibble and smoke.

A young German soldier emerged from a darkened shopfront and peered at us, his eyes wide and grey. He struck me as an innocent: I could imagine

him as a gentle country vicar or priest, with a collection of stamps or railway memorabilia. I knew he wasn’t going to kill us even before he spoke.

‘You can’t go on, sir,’ he told Elgar. ‘There are several unexploded bombs.’

‘Where is the railway station?’ Elgar asked him.

The young soldier pointed back along the canal and gave some directions.

No explanation was asked or offered concerning me (this was to be the case several times during our journey). We began walking back along the canal.

The smell of smoke and dust was strong enough to make me cough,

but Elgar appeared able to ignore it.

‘You’re fighting to win your war, Mr Greene, he said. ‘And I am fighting to win mine. Why do you think there’s a difference?’

‘You don’t think the Allies are morally superior to the Nazis?’ I asked. I was aware of an irony: I was testing Elgar in the way that the Doctor had tested me. Did this mean that the Doctor was more virtuous than I? Again I had the sense of fighting on the wrong side.

‘I’m not concerned with the rights and wrongs of a war,’ said Elgar. ‘I follow orders.’

‘The Germans also claim to be following orders,’ I said. ‘That’s the excuse that some of them give for mass murder. Surely you have better motives?’

Elgar glanced at me. ‘They believe they have better motives. That’s the whole problem. I don’t have to think about motives – I just act.’

‘Like Sartre, then?’

‘Who?’

I explained something of Sartre’s philosophy. His response was, ‘I’m not sure it would work for you, Mr Greene. Existentialism as you describe it isn’t a philosophy: it’s a state of being. I have it, you don’t.’

I wasn’t sure whether his ‘you’ was singular – referring to me – or plural –

referring to all of us. But we were now approaching a main street cluttered with people, and it wasn’t possible to speak in English. I didn’t want to risk exposing my nationality in order to discuss a point of philosophy.

We caught a train that was going to Nuremberg: there were no guarantees after that, but some trains were running to Dresden. The train was crammed with people, but Elgar’s false status got us a compartment to ourselves. The journey was long, with frequent unexplained stops. At about three o’clock we heard the sound of air-raid sirens. The train stopped, then reversed slowly into the shelter of a wood. After a few minutes I heard the dull rumble of engines overhead, and looked up at the open sky visible between the trees. I couldn’t see the planes, and no bombs fell. About half an hour later we went on.

We reached Nuremberg at dusk. The station was bomb-damaged, and the train had to stop a quarter-mile short. A temporary platform had been erected, made of rough unvarnished wood. Around it was a shunting yard broken by bomb craters. A shattered engine was tilted on to an embankment, half in view, like a sinking ship. We got out on to the platform and could smell the smoke and cordite: a porter told us that the city had been bombed again only an hour before.

Elgar asked a porter when the train to Chemnitz was scheduled to leave.

The man shrugged. 'Seven in the morning, last I heard. You'll have to walk to the other side of the station.' He pointed down the tracks. 'The stationmaster's office is open, it's the line that's blocked. Ask him what's happening.'

We did as we were told, following a darkened street of the shabby kind of houses that face railway lines everywhere in the world. The light was fading and there was a strong likelihood of another raid after dark, so we walked quickly. Elgar's heels clicked on the pavement, and again I was reminded of a metronome.

The man had been wrong – the stationmaster's office was not open. The station, half ruined, was in darkness. Elgar and I were turned back by another porter. Slate-haired, with a military bearing, he might have been a general in the army. He gave us precise directions to a place on the track on the other side of the station from where we had disembarked, and said the train would be waiting there. It would leave at seven. 'But get in as soon as you arrive –

don't wait. It might be the last train for several days.'

'Why?' I asked.

He shook his head. 'The situation is very difficult. The English and Americans bomb that line every night. At the moment it is possible to get as far as Chemnitz, but that might not continue. I wish you luck.'

I couldn't resist the next question. 'Do you think the English will win the war?'

He glanced at Elgar, and said, 'The Führer works ceaselessly to save Germany and National Socialism. He cannot fail.'

It wasn't the answer I wanted, but I could see the real answer in the tautness of his face, the hopelessness in his eyes. I wanted to apologise to this solemn old man, who had probably fought men of my father's generation in the last war, and now had to suffer once more the bitter tragedy of defeat.

'Your accent – you are English?' The man was looking at Elgar.

'My prisoner,' said Elgar. 'He is trustworthy, up to a point.'

He glanced from one to the other of us, and I think he suspected us. He said nothing, though, and we walked on in silence, following his directions through the darkened streets. We met no one, and the only sound was a distant droning of engines, perhaps a military convoy.

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'It's a shame,' I told Elgar. 'I'd like to see more of Nuremberg.'

'Why?' he asked.

'I'm curious. It's the heart of Nazism. Like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

Perhaps I want to see "the horror, the horror".'

'Konrad who? Adenauer? You won't see him: he's in prison.'

I had to laugh. Elgar obviously wasn't a literary man, and hadn't heard of Joseph Conrad. His confusion was understandable. For my part I had no idea who Konrad Adenauer was. I asked Elgar, and was given a short but detailed history of Adenauer's career, from Mayor of Cologne onwards to his current imprisonment by the Nazis.

'You know a great deal about German politics,' I observed.

'It's my business to be completely informed. The basic political and historical facts are easily mastered.'

'I wouldn't call the details of a local politician's career a "basic fact"; I said.

'Still, I'm impressed.'

'You never know who will be useful, or necessary. Amassing facts is easy.

It's the language that's difficult. And the disguise.'

‘I thought you found those easy. You have a great facility for it.’

‘A great deal of thinking time is required. And preparation. But we all have the same difficulty.’

‘I didn’t, in Sierra Leone. But then I wasn’t an agent.’

‘You were a controller?’

It was secret, but I told him anyway. ‘Yes. I ran about fifty agents. I wish I could believe we found out one useful thing. It didn’t seem like it at the time.’

‘Why do you worry about it? If you carried out your instructions, then you should be fulfilled. The results are not your concern.’

It was a very odd remark, though not out of line with Elgar’s general philosophy: yet in those dark, cold streets at the heart of the wrecked Nazi empire, its emptiness and inhumanity made me angry ‘They are. They should be yours, too.’

‘You are an imperfect agent, then.’ Elgar’s voice was indifferent.

‘And glad of it. If you don’t feel the consequences of your actions you should not carry them out. A man without feeling is irresponsible.’

‘And if you do feel them, you may not be able to carry them out. If you’re a man.’ He made man sound like a separate species, weaker than his own.

‘If you’re a man –’ I made the word sound as it *should* sound, I hope – ‘you may have no choice but to feel.’

‘It’s a great weakness.’

‘No, it’s a great strength.’

‘How can it be a strength, if it leads to your failing in your mission?’

‘It depends what your mission is. Or who you get it from – man, or God.’

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‘A purpose is a purpose, wherever it comes from.’

‘You can’t say all purposes are the same!’

‘Of course not. But they’re all equivalent in the effect they have upon you.’

‘So if someone gave you a legitimate order to gas a thousand people, you’d do it. Because it would “fulfil” you.’

There was a long silence – too long, because the answer should have been obvious. I felt a sickness in my gut, a sort of fear. I wasn’t afraid Elgar would hurt me – not then. But I think I was afraid of contamination.

‘There’s a contradiction there,’ he said at last. ‘My best answer is “no”.’

‘Why not?’ My voice was harsh.

There was another pause. ‘The desire not to unnecessarily destroy my fellow men.’

It seemed a weak, cold reason, spoken in a weak, cold way. I wasn’t sure he meant it. I think Daria would have meant it a little more, and the Doctor a little more than that. Were they progressively more human? Why? Had the Doctor been here longer than the others? I would have liked to have asked Elgar for direct answers, but our conversation was terminated by the wailing of air-raid sirens. The drone of aircraft followed within a couple of minutes, and the familiar thud and whistle of flak.

We ran for the place where we had been told the train was waiting, but found only empty tracks. A young soldier waved us away. ‘Find a shelter!’

I heard an explosion, felt the ground jump under my feet. There was no time to find a proper shelter. We took cover in a small concrete hut, probably a signaller’s. There was a wooden table with a dirty steel kettle: at Elgar’s suggestion we got under the table, which was of stout wood and would provide us with some protection if the roof came in.

For several minutes the explosions were continuous, and the floor shook.

I expected the small window to break, but it didn’t. When it became a little quieter and the explosions more distant, Elgar said, ‘The men who drop these bombs, for instance. I expect they have killed innocent civilians tonight.’

If they thought about that, and refused to drop the bombs, then the Allies couldn't prosecute the war. The Germans would win. What would happen to your morality then?'

It was a sound argument, but not quite the same one as I had been making.

'You said that any purpose would serve. The men in those planes have made a judgement about their missions: that they are for the greater good.'

'So have the Nazis, including the mass-murderers.'

'No. They act from pure hatred. Their claim to higher motives is no more than an excuse.'

'I don't understand hatred.'

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I looked at him. His face was just visible in the glare from the flames outside: a landscape of weak, shifting light and darkness. His eyes glinted, as if there were extra sources of illumination inside them. I was sure he was telling the truth. 'A man who doesn't understand hatred has no soul,' I said.

'I never claimed to have one.'

'You're an atheist, then?'

'I don't believe in God.'

'Have you ever loved anyone?'

'No.'

It was such a simple, blunt answer that it took my breath away. Most people have to make an excuse for not loving. They'll say that they've never met the right person, or that they were damaged by some previous affair, but they will never admit that they just don't want to. Elgar's lack of feeling – and his lack of any sense that he should have feeling – was worse than this.

'What is the purpose of passion?' asked Elgar.

For a moment I thought he was asking a rhetorical question, along the lines of, 'What's the use of passion? It's never done me any good!'

Then I realised that his question was nothing so human and immature. He genuinely wanted to know the answer. I thought for a while, then said, 'I don't know, but it fulfils me.'

This was a lie. Passion – especially sexual passion – had never fulfilled me, except physically, and then only for moments. But a life without passion was inconceivable.

'Passion serves the purpose of reproducing the species,' said Elgar. 'This is your biological purpose. Therefore passion fulfils you. My mission fulfils me for the same reason.'

'I've known men with better missions who thought that. I didn't believe them either.' I was thinking of a priest who had told me that he never desired women. The passion for God, he said, had replaced the passion for sex: the-ology had superseded biology. I never believed him, suspecting an insidious anger behind his earnest rationality.

'Believe me or not, it's the truth.'

His face had a solemnity that I associate with truth (it was far more solid than that of the disturbed priest), but I didn't believe him even so.

'What about Daria?' I asked him.

'Don't confuse what you felt with what I felt,' he said.

'And what did you feel?'

'She was my mother,' he said.

I looked away from him, across the darkened floor at the ghostly legs of a stool. Then I closed my eyes against the flame's light. A world of impossibilities danced against my mind behind the closed lids.

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'I'm sorry,' I said, after an age. 'I didn't realise how different you could be.'

'Well, now you do.'

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Chapter Sixteen

We waited in silence for the all-clear, and emerged to find a train shambling in from the darkness, orange sparks spitting from its wheels. It stopped and we scrambled aboard. Our papers were checked by a boy who looked no more than fourteen and whose chief emotion was fear. His blue eyes shot to Elgar's forbidding Nazi face and away again, and his hands shook so much that he dropped the papers twice. He can have made no real inspection. He apologised to Elgar, but the man gave him no comfort. I knew that he would see no reason for comfort. The boy was an irrelevance to the logic of Elgar's mind; his comfort or discomfort didn't register. It did register with me, but all I could do was clasp the boy's shoulder in reassurance as we boarded.

After all the talk of danger and difficulty, this train journey was rapid and uninterrupted. The German countryside sped by, bright and undamaged, brick farm buildings nestling in ordered winter fields, specked with cabbage and parsnips and potatoes. Elgar was silent, his arms folded across his chest, his face neutral. I should have been ready to sleep, but Elgar's revelations had unsettled me beyond any chance of rest. I asked how old Daria had been.

'Physically, about twenty months,' said Elgar. 'Actually, infinitely old. I told you, we don't forget.'

'And you?'

He shrugged. 'The same.'

'The Doctor?'

'I don't know. He's not one of us.'

'He's not one of us, either.'

'Maybe not. That's his affair. Look, old chap, I'll come clean with you. I'm no danger to you – just a purpose that happens to look like a man, really. But the ones I'm after are dangerous. You met them in Markebo, didn't you? And you saw them kill?'

'I didn't see it.'

'They're like – cuckoos, I suppose you could say. They lodge in the mind and rule it. Make men into copies of themselves.'

I didn't believe him. It had the air of a legend – the legend of the golem, perhaps. If he had researched lesser German politicians, he

would have researched legends, and the nursery tales you use to scare children. ‘You want me to be afraid of them,’ I told him.

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‘I want you to realise that they’re a danger to you, not us.’

I wasn’t convinced. ‘I think you’re all dangerous. You shouldn’t be here.’

‘Well, we are. There isn’t anything to be done about it.’

‘And the Doctor?’ I asked again.

‘I don’t know, old chap. I really don’t know. That’s why I said you should leave him to me.’

It was almost dark when we got to Dresden. Thick sheets of ash lay across the railway track and formed layers of haze in the air, through which rose the ruins of the city’s firebombed factories. The temptation is there to make a comparison with the charred bones of Valhalla, but the reality was sadder and more human than that. There were little white and dun-coloured patches amongst the dark ruins: it took me a few moments to notice that they were human beings, sleeping on blankets. They must have been refugees, because the city itself was still intact at this date, though some streets near the railway were bomb-damaged. I saw children playing in the rubble, firing at each other with sticks.

The railway station had been bombed, too, but there was one platform open. The others were piled with broken stone and glass. I was still unsettled by Elgar’s revelations. I must have seemed jittery when we left the station –

the guard became suspicious and engaged Elgar in a long, rapid conversation in which the word ‘trust’ occurred several times. This time Elgar did not produce his gun – perhaps he was learning diplomacy. I remembered the strangers I had met in Sierra Leone, how little they had known at first, how much they knew now – if Elgar was one of them, and this wasn’t another layer of his camouflage. Was he one of the seekers, as he claimed, or was he the original invader? I had no way of telling. And what was the Doctor’s role? Even Elgar said he didn’t know. And the emotional facts of the situation confounded me. I felt antipathy for the Doctor, but that was because he had manipulated me into killing Daria. I felt little either way for Elgar. However, I still had little choice but to go along with him. We

were in Dresden: it couldn't be long, now, before the end, when everything would come together and I would have to make my choice.

The arrangements for meeting the code makers were based on the message that Elgar had sent and that the Doctor had tampered with. We were to meet them in a restaurant on Chemnitzstrasse. You can see from Turing's narrative that he had warned Elgar about the Doctor's interference – but neither Elgar nor Turing had told me, so I had no reason to believe that anything would go wrong. Nonetheless, I feared that they would see through Elgar's disguise at once and kill us both, but Elgar was sanguine. 'They're more careful than 128

that,' he said. 'If they believe there's a possibility of rescue they'll be there, and they'll talk to me.'

The 'restaurant' was even worse than English restaurants were at the time.

The window had been broken by bomb blast, and was boarded up. A burly man guarded the door and checked our papers. He tried to refuse me entry.

Elgar bullied and shouted, and the man decided to allow me in, but only on the condition that I didn't eat anything – restaurant food was for Aryans only, it seemed, and it was more than the man's life was worth to disobey this edict.

It was smoky and crowded inside, with the smell of sour food. The meal consisted mainly of cabbage, with a few tiny chunks of potato: Elgar allowed me to eat most of his. 'You'll need it,' he said. 'I can manage without for a while.'

We waited for two hours, but no one came. The message had specified a time and a place, but not a date – we hadn't known for sure when we would arrive in Dresden.

At last, over a cup of almost tasteless ersatz coffee, I said, 'Perhaps they weren't able to send anyone today.'

'More likely someone else got to them first.' Elgar was gloomy, his chin in his hands; it made him seem more human.

We left the restaurant. Outside, we were surrounded by a bustle of people, most of them dressed in old and shabby clothes. A few wore the star of David stitched to their clothing, the compulsory mark of the Jew in Nazi Germany.

As we walked along I found myself avoiding them from a sort of unconscious embarrassment, which slowly germinated into shame.

‘We’ll have to stay somewhere,’ I pointed out, after we had wandered for some time at random in the growing darkness.

Elgar was in favour of bullying our way into military accommodation, but accepted my suggestion that it would be easier in the circumstances to bully civilians. We returned to Chemnitzstrasse and billeted ourselves on a hair-dresser three doors away from the restaurant. The owner, Mrs Cohn, was unsure, but Elgar had both cash and ration vouchers to offer as ‘compensa-tion’, and her resistance crumbled.

Mrs Cohn was an old woman, almost seventy, and had recently lost her husband to intestinal cancer. The ‘flat above’, where we had the spare room, was full of dark wood and dim remembrances of the departed Mr Cohn: black-and-silver photographs, umbrellas, boots, long shadows. Mrs Cohn’s pale face hovered in the dusty silences, offering us ersatz coffee and potato soup. We refused the soup but I accepted the coffee, which was even more awful than that in the restaurant. I sensed that beneath her thin hospitality, she was very afraid, but there was nothing I could do to reassure her.

I slept on the bed in the spare room, which may have been the late Mr 129

Cohn’s – the room looked lived in, with a faint smell of tobacco and elderly flesh: Mr Cohn hadn’t slept with his wife. I wondered about the how and why of this domestic detail whilst Elgar, who certainly hadn’t noticed it, took a pillow and lay down on the floor. I don’t think he slept. I don’t think he ever slept; if he did, I didn’t see him doing it. I did, though uneasily. Cuckoos in the shape of slugs moved in my dreams, impossible beings laying trails of slime that burned like a fever.

At about three in the morning, I was woken by a violent knocking on the street door. Elgar was already on his feet, and when I emerged on to the landing, my shoes in my hand, I saw Mrs Cohn at her room door, wearing a long white gown. Her body was shaking with fear.

‘Don’t be afraid,’ I said in my weak German, but she didn’t respond. Her eyes looked through me to a more distant place, and I heard a muttering sound that may have been prayer. Downstairs, Elgar and another man were shouting in German. I hurried down the stairs, still

holding my shoes. A uniformed man was standing in the narrow hallway below, his thin, angled form a shadow against a strong light outside. I was reminded of the golem that Elgar had warned me to fear. The stories did not seem so unlikely now.

‘You must come with us,’ said the golem. ‘Or we will have to kill you.’

I knew that this was not an SS man, despite his uniform. He had the wrong tone of voice. His words suggested a not-quite-human motive. I sat on the stairs and pulled on my shoes, more as a way of holding up the action than anything else.

‘We’ll have to go,’ said Elgar.

Upstairs, there was a thud, like a sack falling. I turned to go and look. Elgar and the SS man started to shout at each other again.

‘Halt!’

To my shame, I halted. I turned and went back down the stairs, and I allowed the false SS officer to accompany me into the electric light. Behind me, Mrs Cohn may well have been dying. I have never found out what happened to her. The address was destroyed with the rest of Dresden in the firebombing.

We were led to a waiting car. Our captors – there were three of them – were polite, once they had got their way. There was no policeman-like attempt at intimidation or interrogation. The leader – a plump-faced man with a cunning expression – sat in the back seat between us, and watched us with care, as if making an assessment. Now fully awake, I had shaken off my fearful dreams, and again doubted Elgar’s story of cuckoos intent on ousting my mind from my body. The man sitting between us was too real to be a golem – he was solid, fleshy, with Aryan blue eyes. He was uncertain, angry, anxious – no 130

more than a jumpy boy, perhaps twenty-seven years of age. I started to doubt my assumption that these men were the ones who had sent the radio message. It seemed far more likely that they were real SS. I reminded myself that this might be worse than their being golems, and checked my pocket for the cyanide capsule. It was still there.

I was wondering if I would have the courage to use it when I realised that the car had stopped, and not in a place where I would have expected the SS

to make their headquarters. It was a dark, steep street with a distinct

odour of sewage, even on this cold night. We were ushered out and into a darkened building which had a creaking wooden door, and the damp stone ambience of a church. After a few moments and some echoing, whispered conversation ahead of us, a match was struck, revealing the face of the Doctor.

‘Hello, Mr Greene, Colonel! I’m glad you could make it.’

The lines were those of a B-movie villain – and they worked. I became convinced that the Doctor was on the side of evil.

131

Chapter Seventeen

They put us in the crypt. They tied Elgar to a chair, roped his hands together, and put a hood over his head, but they were satisfied to handcuff me to an upturned table. Perhaps, since I was human, they didn’t think of me as a threat. I decided that it must be a Lutheran church: there was no smell of incense here, no rich colours or holy reliquaries, only bare boards and the most basic stores – a few candles, empty bottles of holy wine, and a spare set of vestments, dark and tattered like an eccentric old schoolmaster’s gown.

The place smelled of dampness and mouse droppings.

The Doctor sent Turing down to talk to us, which was a good move, and would have worked, perhaps, if Turing hadn’t been so determined to prove his own personal version of the truth.

‘You see!’ he began, as ebullient as a child, ‘They’re not concentration-camp guards!’

‘That’s not the point,’ I said. With everything else that had happened, I had difficulty remembering the conversation we’d had about the camps in Paris. I recalled that Turing had been concerned about ‘the truth’ then, too, and not at all interested in the fate of thousands, perhaps millions, of European Jews –

and here he was, still on the same tack, when the wind had changed and the land had risen in spiked mountains all around us.

‘They’re like the Doctor!’ This prospect, too, seemed to fill Turing with a childlike glee. His face was illuminated with that selfish flush, that suffusion of blood that you see in children when the lollipop of their choice has been provided. I wondered what lollipops the Doctor was

providing for Turing.

‘The Doctor and his friends,’ I told him, ‘have just locked us up in a damp cellar and are probably going to kill us. Perhaps they’ll torture us a bit first –’

‘No! No! No! You’ve got it all wrong!’ Such was Turing’s vehemence that I knew that he, at least, believed in the Doctor’s goodness. ‘The Doctor is sending them home,’ he explained. There’s a device we’re working on – they know the design, but the Doctor knows more about electronics here and Heller and I are helping him to assemble it. It’s fascinating –’

‘So why is Colonel Elgar tied to a chair?’ I wondered who Heller was, but refrained from asking. Another golem, perhaps.

Turing looked at me with a sly expression. ‘Do you know who Elgar really is?’

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‘Do you?’ I was reminded of my conversation with the Doctor in Africa.

‘I know he’s dangerous. I know –’

‘He says that the Doctor and his friends are dangerous, Alan. How do we know who to believe? We should get out of here. Leave them to it.’

‘How would we get back?’

I shrugged. ‘We’ll survive. Germany’s finished anyway – it can’t be more than a few weeks now before they give in. How did you get here?’

‘Well – Heller flew us over in the end. We had to crash the plane.’

‘Who’s Heller?’

‘A pilot. We didn’t want to use him, but the other plan didn’t work.’ He leaned forward, whispered the secret. ‘The Doctor tried to smuggle us in with some Germans who wanted to go home before the war ended’ The naïveté of this statement took my breath away, but then he was looking at the ground, fiddling with his hands in an embarrassed manner. ‘Elgar found out and we were nearly caught. One of them got killed. It was horrible.’

‘Death is horrible,’ I said. ‘But I can’t think that the world will miss a Nazi collaborator.’

‘He was a human being! There was blood on the snow – you don’t understand –’

I had to concede him this one. I remembered the woman whom we may have killed in Stuttgart. ‘Yes, Alan. I do understand. I’m sorry, it must have been very unpleasant.’

I noticed that Turing was wearing a brown worsted travelling suit. It was neater and newer than his usual apparel. I wondered if the Doctor had bought it for him and, if so, where.

‘The Doctor doesn’t mind letting you go, you know,’ Turing said. He was still looking at his shoelaces. I noticed that one was undone. ‘But you must give your word not to run away. He knows you won’t hurt anyone.’

I thought about this. Despite my brave words about surviving in the col-lapsing ruin of the Nazi German state, I knew that I didn’t have anywhere to run. Without papers, ration cards or even German money, and with a clear English accent, I wouldn’t last an hour.

‘Very well,’ I said. ‘I give my word.’

I glanced at Elgar, tied to his chair in the corner, but he gave no sign of being involved in the conversation, though he must have heard us.

‘No one will hurt him,’ said Turing.

‘They killed his friend,’ I pointed out.

‘It was an accident!’

‘No it wasn’t, Alan,’ I said. I had a stark tactile memory, the cold arched metal of the ‘surveillance device’ in my hands, the velvet bed drapes against my wrist. I became aware of the burned skin on my back, the slight soreness 134

still there, and of course that brought back Daria: her scent, slightly unwomanly, her eyes, the delicate cool arches of her body. ‘Passion makes fools of us all,’ I commented.

He was still staring at his laces. ‘No,’ he said. ‘Passion only makes fools of some of us, Graham.’

I didn't know whether or not he was including himself amongst the fools.

'And who are the better men?' was the best retort I could come up with.

He didn't reply, just reached down and uncuffed me from the table.

Elgar spoke up then, his voice muffled by the hood. 'Remember – they're the dangerous ones, whatever this man thinks.'

I knew he was right, but said nothing. Telling Elgar the truth about my state of mind was the least of my problems. I had established the degree of duplicity needed to work in this situation. Despite the strangeness, it was not very different from ordinary espionage. The straightforwardness of the strangers, their willingness to talk and act in cliché, was an advantage. Nobody here was making a very good job of any pretence, except possibly the Doctor, who was pretending to be good – something I was all too familiar with. I knew that the best solution would be to expel all of them – burn them back to whatever heaven or hell they came from, and remove any danger they might offer to us that way. But I could see no chance of doing that, given the immediate human evil that surrounded us. For the time being I would have to play their games, and I hoped I could play them well enough to survive.

Turing led me up into the body of the church. A single candle was illuminated, showing the Doctor's face and the dim wooden shape of a plain choir stall. He was holding a silver object that I at first took to be a pen. I tried to look around, but could see only darkness. I scuffed my foot on the floor and heard dim stony echoes. The Doctor looked at me, but didn't speak.

Air-raid sirens started up outside. The sound was different from the English sort: more a screech than a wail, it varied in intensity as if the machines were walking the landscape. I was reminded of H.G. Wells's Martians and their tripedal war machines. I reflected that even things of human making could be alien.

The Doctor stood up, placing his face in shadow. 'I had to get you away from the colonel,' he said. 'He's dangerous, you know.'

'Probably. But don't expect any more help.'

'Oh, you can't help me anyway.' The Doctor's tone was offhand. He moved the silver thing in his hand, and I saw that it wasn't a pen – it

had a slight curve which was familiar. Too familiar.

‘You killed Daria.’ I didn’t see any point in wasting time.

‘No. The device killed her. And now it’s lost, because the users were stupid and innocent and so was I.’

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The Doctor’s tone was so profound in its regret that I almost believed him.

But a moment’s thought was like rubbing the surface of a fake reliquary: the patina of innocence wore away at once, revealing a new and unpleasant metal.

‘Why are they collaborating with Nazis then?’

‘Not collaborating – disguised! Have you become stupid all of a sudden?’

‘Disguised, then.’

‘Graham, they don’t even know where they are.’

‘I know where I am – held prisoner in a damp Protestant church in a foreign city.’

‘You’re not a prisoner. You can go if you want. . . ’

I finished the cliché for him. ‘. . . but I won’t get far.’

We looked at each other. The Doctor’s classical face, with an eyebrow raised, looked like that of an eighteenth-century nobleman-dilettante. ‘That’s hardly my fault, is it?’ he said. ‘Come on, Graham, don’t be silly. I’m as upset about Daria’s death as you are –’

‘No you aren’t.’

‘Yes I *am*. But it isn’t as simple as you think –’

‘No, it never is when you want to kill people.’ I was angry – more angry than I would have thought possible. This man had tricked me into killing Daria, and now he was pretending he regretted it. Well, he probably did, and perhaps God would forgive him, but at that moment I couldn’t.

‘I think I should go back to the crypt,’ I said.

The Doctor shook his head, and I heard a tremulous low sound, a deep vibration. Such was the strangeness of my mood that for a moment I took it for the susurrations of giant wings, and was looking around for fallen angels in the shadows around us. Then it was repeated, and the windows rattled, and I recognised the distant thud of high explosives.

‘The raid’s started,’ said the Doctor. His tone was dark, as dark as those imagined wings.

‘We should go.’ The voice came from the shadows, and it had echoes of the music I had heard in Africa. I was confused – hadn’t those musical ones been Elgar’s people? Who were the pursued, and who were the pursuers? Then I remembered it didn’t matter. They were all alien to my conception.

There was a whistle in the air, and light flickered outside.

‘Are we taking this new one?’

‘Yes, yes, of course. We can’t let him die.’

There was a slight stress on the word ‘him’. To show that I hadn’t missed it, I asked, ‘So who are you planning to allow to die? Or is that a stupid question?’

There was a silence. The Doctor blew the candle out, and at the same time a bright flare sent trails of coloured light across the floor. I saw the tall, human

yet un-human shape which had always been there in the darkness near the altar. I think I stood up – moved back. The Doctor shouted, ‘Look out!’

I fell backwards, and my head hit the cold stone. Whilst I was recovering, feeling a pain in my ankle, and deciding that I had not been attacked but had simply fallen over the corner of a choir stall, the light from outside faded.

A hand grabbed my arm, painfully tight. ‘Come on!’ It was Turing’s voice, husky with the excitement of a *Boy’s Own* adventure. Perhaps he’d never had any adventures before. I let him lead me out, because getting out of that building seemed a good idea.

We passed through the heavy wooden door. Outside, the air smelled

of cordite and cinders – the familiar air-raid smell. I could hear the hum of aircraft, too low and too many. The thud of explosives was everywhere, and the white flames of incendiaries were beginning to rise. This was like the worst nights of the blitz. I could hear distant screams, weak under the roar of engines. There was more than one person crying out: several deaths merging together, mice caught by cats. Except that the cats were on ‘my’ side. It wasn’t an easy thought to live with, when I could see the flames and hear the screams of the dying.

The Doctor and the SS men were out of the church building now. I saw that the tall stranger was one of the SS, but he no longer seemed so human.

However, in the face of the terrible inhumanity of the air raid, the nature of my captors was irrelevant.

‘We should let Elgar go,’ I told Turing.

‘We *can’t*,’ said the Doctor. The church door thumped closed behind him, and I heard the scratching of a key.

‘Don’t take any notice of him,’ I told Turing. ‘He isn’t human.’

‘Does it matter what he is?’ asked Turing. His voice was that of a puzzled schoolboy. ‘Surely it’s what he does that matters.’

I knew I would have to give up on Turing then: he was no use. I walked back to the church.

‘Give me the key,’ I said. ‘We’re not leaving Elgar behind, tied up in the middle of an air raid. It’s –’ I nearly said ‘inhuman’.

‘You don’t understand what he will do,’ said one of the fake SS men. ‘And we are not killing him, because he is not alive. You should know this if you have spoken to him.’

I wondered if the real SS said that about the Jews. Probably they did.

‘He seemed alive to me,’ I told them. ‘He is entitled to human compassion, just like you.’

I heard an intake of breath from the Doctor, but he said nothing. Nearby, there was a big explosion. Glass shattered along the street, and a hot wind 137

blew. The wind kept blowing, becoming cold and gritty, new air moving towards the centre of the city from which sheets of white flames were rising.

‘The firestorm,’ said the Doctor. He looked around with a desperate expression, but seemed to have no more words.

‘Let me back into the church,’ I said.

I saw that the tall ‘SS man’ was holding a gun. Or perhaps it wasn’t a gun.

It was hard to tell in the intense, drifting light.

I started running, and at the same time heard the whistle of shrapnel and a series of small impacts as the material hit the road. There was a cry behind me. I turned and saw that the ‘SS man’ was kneeling. A chunk of shrapnel the size of a roofing slate was buried in his shoulder. He stood up, and I realised that he was unhurt, though the wound should have killed a man, or at least knocked him out. He walked towards me, still holding the gun, as if nothing very much had happened. Part of his shoulder flapped around like a door on a loose hinge. I was more afraid then than I have ever been.

The light brightened, and an explosion of glass fragments flew around me.

I wasn’t hit, but a fragment caught the man with the gun. He wavered for a moment. I saw that the church windows had burst outwards, and that flames were roaring inside.

No, I thought. I’m not going to let Elgar die like Daria. I darted across and began to climb the church wall towards one of the shattered windows. They weren’t the usual leaded panes – the breach was quite big enough for me to climb through. A drainpipe aided my grip on the wall.

‘Don’t kill him!’ shouted the Doctor.

The thought that they weren’t trying to kill me was more frightening than the thought of death. Elgar’s stories of cuckoos taking over my mind no longer seemed like fairy tales. I fought my way through the remains of the window, sustaining several cuts. I noticed the blood, but felt no pain. Inside the heat was tremendous, but I felt that only in an abstract way, as something that must be avoided for purely practical reasons. Death didn’t bother me, but I didn’t want to faint

and risk being caught alive.

The choir stalls were burning, but at the far end I could see the door that led to the crypt. I ran inside and saw Elgar still tied to his chair. As I untied him, he said, 'You needn't have bothered, old chap. I was quite safe here. But thank you, anyway.'

As soon as he was free he ran up the steps, into the smoky confusion of the nave. I followed, but couldn't see a thing. I saw that I would be safer in the crypt, so I went back down and closed the door. There was smoke here too, but only a little, and not too much heat. Perhaps, I thought, Elgar would have been safe here, as he had said he would be. Had I been jumping to conclusions? Had the Doctor wanted to kill him, or just keep him out of the 138

way? But why bring him here in the first place? If he hadn't come for us, we would never have found him. It was *Alice in Wonderland* again.

Worrying about this, I went to the cupboard where the vestments were kept, hoping I think to protect myself from the smoke and heat as far as possible. I disturbed the tattered black cloth, and it moved heavily, as if something were in the pocket. I felt there, and found myself holding a service revolver. I stared at it, and decided it was Elgar's, and that Turing must have put it in this rather ridiculous hiding place. I was going to leave it there, and I don't doubt that I should have done, but then it occurred to me that it would be better to shoot myself than fall into the hands of either the Doctor and his fake SS, or of the real Gestapo. I hefted the gun and put it in my pocket, without checking if it was loaded. I don't think I even checked to see if the safety catch was on.

It can have been only a few minutes later that I heard the screams. I knew them at once – the same piglike screams that had echoed through the Hotel du Parc as Daria died. I started to climb the steps without considering the fire, or the danger. This time, I had to stop it.

The fire had all but burned itself out, but the smoke was thick. I coughed my way to the door, and saw Elgar with one arm ablaze, whirling like Catherine on the wheel. The Doctor was watching, holding out one arm towards him.

Turing had his back turned, as I would have expected. Tongues of flame rose behind them from the buildings of the city, as if Hell awaited. I lifted the gun, fiddled with the safety catch, and shot at the Doctor as well as I could. The gun jumped in my hand and I almost

dropped it. The Doctor turned, startled, and Elgar began to run down the street, still screaming, trailing gobbets of fire from his arm. His jacket was ablaze.

I fired again at the Doctor, this time holding the gun with a better grip. He dropped, whether because I'd hit him or to take cover I couldn't tell. I ran after Elgar, ducking and weaving in case anyone tried to fire back at me. I don't know whether anyone did – it was difficult to tell over the continuing racket of the air raid and the roar of the wind. I heard Turing shouting, something about being reasonable. There was an explosion nearby – falling flak, I think, rather than a bomb – but it was enough to send me diving for the cover of a wall. I got up almost at once, but then I could see only flames ahead, the whole street ablaze, and no trace of Elgar. I stopped, as I realised just how much fire there was. The sky was boiling with smoke, and a steady rain of ash and small debris fell around me. Dresden was being destroyed. I tried to think it was because of the Jews, that it was to save lives, but I couldn't convince myself. It was because of the stubbornness of a few men, not all of them on the German side, and a city was dying in front of me. Thousands of lives were ending, and there was no real purpose to it.

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A hand touched my arm. I turned and saw that it was Turing. He had a cut on his face, and was bleeding.

'Where are the others?'

He shrugged. 'They went, when you shot the Doctor.'

'Went where?'

He ignored the question. 'Come on, we've got to go home now.'

'Home?' I waved at the burning city. 'And how are we to go home? In case you haven't noticed, there's a war on.'

Turing looked around him, for all the world like a little boy lost. I glanced around one more time for Elgar, then told myself I'd done my best. He was on his own now, as we all are when Hell closes in. 'We'd better find a cellar,' I said. 'As deep as possible.'

The wind, which had started off cold, was getting hotter.

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Chapter Eighteen

‘It was self-defence, you know.’ Turing’s face was flushed, and he had a lecturing, hectoring tone, inappropriate to the subject matter. ‘What the Doctor was doing. Elgar is dangerous. He would have killed the others. He might kill –’

‘Maybe.’

‘You shouldn’t have interfered. It would have been all right if he’d stayed in the crypt. We had a plan.’

‘You had a plan,’ I agreed. ‘And I shouldn’t have interfered. I’m sorry, all right?’

I wasn’t sorry, but I was willing to say anything to shut Turing up. Perhaps he was right. It wasn’t our war. Our war was raining down on top of us now.

We’d been lucky: we’d found the beer cellar of a public house, the doors flung open, the space deserted except for a small, thin, silver-grey cat, which Turing had picked up and cuddled as if it were a baby. It was purring in his arms as we talked. Around him was a large, quiet space filled with empty wooden barrels – at least, I assumed they were empty. There was no familiar smell of beer, or wood – even here the air was hot and thick with the stink of oily smoke. It had occurred to me that this place would burn like a bonfire if an incendiary landed, which was no doubt why it was deserted: but it had been the only shelter we could find. Now it was getting hotter, and the smell was getting stronger. I looked around for an exit that didn’t involve climbing the stone steps that led back to the street.

‘You have killed the Doctor.’

Turing’s accusation distracted me from my search for an escape route. It was my turn to look at my boots and feel guilty. Perhaps that was why he’d followed me – to make me feel guilty. I couldn’t think of any other reason.

‘It wasn’t my intention to kill anyone,’ I said. ‘Not even the Doctor. I was frightened and confused. I acted without thinking. I’ve told you, I’m sorry.’

Turing shrugged. ‘It’s no good being sorry if he’s dead.’

‘And is he?’

‘I don’t know. It doesn’t matter. What matters is that you were willing to do it. To kill –’

‘You’re enjoying this, aren’t you?’ I snapped. This is your revenge for my not liking you. The Doctor’s death matters less to you than it does to me!’

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‘That’s not true,’ said Turing sadly. He looked at me. ‘I don’t think you realise what you’ve done yet. If he’s dead –’

‘Nothing will matter if it gets any hotter in here,’ I snapped.

The heat felt like a choking wall, closing in around me. The sweat was running into my eyes, stinging them. I wiped it away with my sleeve. Turing started to cough, eyes bulging. A thin, snakelike trail of smoke was drifting down the wooden stairs. Someone banged on the doors and shouted in German.

‘It will matter,’ said Turing, as I started up the stairs. I opened the door, and saw Elgar’s face. He was holding his melted, useless, arm: I could see a bare stalk of metal protruding from the damaged material. His uniform was burned – not in tatters as you see in films, but charred and clinging to his body, as if it had always been a part of it. Perhaps it had.

‘How bad is it?’ I asked him. Somehow I managed to keep my voice calm.

‘It’s all right, old boy. It doesn’t hurt a bit. But I’m glad I’ve found you here.

I’m blind.’

I saw then that his eyes were white, like those of a cooked fish. I tried not to be squeamish, but I remembered Daria. Was the heat all from the street, or was his skin burning? Even so, I stepped back to let him pass.

‘You’re not going to let him in here!’ squealed Turing from below.

‘What do you want to do, let him die?’

The cat struggled out of Turing’s arms and dropped, yowling, to the floor. It scooted up the steps past Elgar and into the street, then,

before I could close the doors, came panicking back again. I slammed the doors down and bolted them. A moment later there was a huge explosion and I was almost thrown from the stairs. When I regained my balance, Turing was above me, unbolting the doors.

‘What are you doing?’

He didn’t reply, just opened the doors. A wave of heat and smoke came in.

‘Close them!’ I snapped.

‘I’m not staying in here with him – I’m going back to the Doctor!’

I grabbed his arm. If he went back to the Doctor, then the Doctor would know where Elgar was. And I had no doubt that unless the American bombers above did for the Doctor and his friends, they would come after us.

‘Don’t go!’

From behind me, Elgar’s voice growled, ‘You’ll have to kill him. Now!’

The barked order had the opposite effect to that intended: I let Turing go.

I’d had enough of this war. There was little enough prospect of survival as it was. I was sweating hard enough by now for the liquid to be dripping off my chin, as if I were back in the tropics. I looked out into the street. I couldn’t see Turing in the glare of the flames, and the heat was like that of an oven.

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I wouldn’t make it with Elgar, and I wasn’t about to leave him. I slammed and bolted the doors once more, and retreated into the now smoky air of the cellar.

Then I noticed the cat. It was perched awkwardly on the brick wall beyond the beer barrels, sniffing at a dark space between the bricks. Suddenly it crawled in, tail waving. Elgar and I looked at one another, and followed her.

It was easy enough to climb up to the hole in the wall. It was the entrance to a narrow brick tunnel which sloped downwards. I imagined it had been used for the passage of beer barrels: it was about

the right size. I saw the cat in the tunnel, a dim grey ghost almost out of the light. I helped Elgar up, and we set off through the narrow, damp space.

A moment later, the lights went out behind us. But the tunnel carried on, for what seemed like a mile but was probably less than a hundred yards. The stone floor levelled off. I could hear the sounds and the cordite smells of outside ahead, and better still there was the splash of water. Another hundred yards took us to a low brick jetty on the edge of a narrow body of water –

perhaps a canal, or a natural spur of the Elbe. The skyline was still white with flame, and the sky itself still red. The wind whipped around us, stinking of flame and ash, and explosions pounded in the distance. I could hear flames nearby, but it wasn't hot. People were crowded on to the other side of the waterway, where there was an old towpath: on our side, it was all brick.

Several people called out to us, but I couldn't make out the German words.

I didn't risk a reply. Pieces of flotsam drifted along the water. I saw several pieces of torn, burned clothing, which told their own horrid story and, more gruesome, a hand, severed from its body, drifting in the brown water like a white spider.

'You should leave me,' said Elgar suddenly. 'I am damaged beyond the ability to carry out my function. In a few hours I will be nonfunctional and my purpose will be lost.'

It took me a few moments to work out that he had told me he was going to die. When I had worked it out, I said what people most often say in such situations. 'Nonsense. Just stay with me. I'll get you out of this.'

Even as I spoke the words I knew that I was speaking in the clichés of Elgar's false identity, the identity betrayed by the bare metal and the melted remains of his arm, but I didn't care. I had to maintain something, some surface of the recognisable over the incomprehensible. It seems strange now that at this, the darkest moment of the war, I should resort to the easy thinking of a propaganda film. But I remembered Daria's self-sacrifice, and that I had abandoned her. I wasn't going to do it again.

Elgar was scrabbling at the bricks behind us with his one hand. 'The purpose is lost,' he said again.

I looked across the water, and saw three men in SS uniform cutting through the crowd on the other side, swords through quaking flesh. They were carrying something, and I saw that it was a body on a stretcher. They tipped it into the water without ceremony, and it was then that I saw it was the Doctor, his head wrapped in a bloodstained sheet and the ancient clothes smeared with more blood. The corpse fell face-down, and drifted away with the current.

The slowness was unbearable.

I turned round to Elgar, who had not moved. 'The Doctor's dead,' I whispered. 'I killed him.'

'Good. But don't underestimate the strangers. They're the really dangerous ones. You should kill them too, if you can.'

I stared at him, and realised he meant it. To him, death was a solution to a problem, a resolution. It was neither a tragedy nor a transition: he didn't care what lay beyond death, only whether the fact of death would change the situation here on Earth. I had been surrounded by men like him since the war started, bank clerks with guns whose job was to cancel Hitler's moral overdraft with an interest in death. An interest the rate of which kept increasing, was increasing now as the bombs destroyed an ancient city around us.

In short, I knew then that I had chosen the wrong side, and that the wrong man was floating away down the river. The light of flames still shone off the water and the air was hot as if it were bleeding from Hell, but the rumble of explosions was receding now, like distant thunder. The raid, I realised, was all but finished. I wonder how many of the bomb pilots felt as I did. I had accomplished a mission, but all it had brought was death, and I had saved no one. I didn't even feel like saving myself.

I heard a sound from the water, and saw a small rowing boat sawing its way across towards us, with a man at each oar. They were shadowy, gowned – they might have been the strangers, or possibly the ferrymen come to take us across the Stygian water to the burning land on the other side. I even checked in my pocket for coins, and found the cyanide capsule. I have never been closer to using it.

Joseph Heller shortly after his death. At the bottom of the ms. is a note in an unknown handwriting, neither Greene's nor Heller's:

'Looks like Greene couldn't bring himself to write any more – can you finish the story?']

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Book Three

The Catch-22 Test

Chapter Nineteen

Where do I start? At the beginning of my story, I guess. It has nothing to do with Greene's, or Turing's, except incidentally. Initially the Doctor just wanted an airplane – the man was desperate to get out, a feeling I understood very well at the time. When I first saw him, in a hospital ward on Malta, I knew.

He had that tic, that rolling movement of the eyes, that restless tossing of the head as if his brain was trying to get out and crawl away on its own. I just didn't know how far away he wanted to crawl, how much further it was than my own mediocre desires, which at the time ran to no more than escaping the war.

I don't think that Greene, or Turing, understood what the Doctor was doing, or where he was trying to go, until it was too late. Turing was thinking mostly about his own feelings, and Greene about the Doctor's nature. All along, I was more interested in what the Doctor was going to do – not that this interest did me any good. However, I can hardly claim my attitude came about because of any unusual prescience. When somebody walks into your life and tells you he wants to steal an airplane, you generally watch him closely.

I thought he was mad even before he explained his plans for grand larceny.

I thought he was mad because he wanted to talk to me, and at the time I was mad, or pretending to be. It's hard to tell the difference between pretence and reality, especially when the truth has been hushed up and hidden from biographers.

I wonder if the Doctor has ever worried about biographers. Turing seemed to have appointed himself as one, then killed himself. Greene sought to explain the mystery, but gave it up before the end, as if he

felt he were writing a bad novel and couldn't bring it to a creative conclusion. I'm sure it must have been the Doctor who, somehow (perhaps a deathbed visit to Greene?) made certain that the manuscript reached me in the spring of '92.

The trouble is that so many years have passed now since 1944 that I'm not so sure what happened any more, and, worse, I write gappy, hurried prose, the prose of an old man approaching mortality and with better things to do than write. Perhaps time has a different meaning to you, Doctor – you always seemed older than you looked, so perhaps age truly does not wither you, nor time its battle-axe take to your features; perhaps like a fictional character you are ageless and changeless. But then, if you're ageless and changeless, the 149

need to justify your actions must become even stronger, as the years go on, and the memories rust, and the consequences multiply. Did you hope I would justify them? I'm still just as sorry as I was that day almost fifty years ago when I murdered in your name. All I can say is that, unlike Greene, I have forgiven you. For my own reasons.

But enough of the present. Let's go back to Malta in 1944, to that sepia ward where I was probably only pretending to be mad. This was a pretence, you must understand, brought about by the necessity of war. It was a sacrifice made in honor of the men and women of America. I respected them enough, even at the tender age of a bit more than twenty, to pretend to be insane, in order to stop myself from having to kill strangers in their name. I also didn't much want my inner organs ripped out by flak, a risk I had been forced to run more than fifty times in order to murder people with high explosives from two miles into the sky.

In honor of this great, muddled, unadventurous sacrifice for the American people, I had been placed in a large cool space with a bare stone ceiling and a floor of darkened wood, where barred beams of sunlight from the barred windows just touched the knees of the nurses. To ensure that I stayed alive and alert, I had been fed pap food which wasn't quite bad enough to make me vomit (in other words, better food than usual), and then examined by a parade of doctors who poked, prodded, and tested my heart, my liver, my ap-pendix, my upper and lower intestines, my spleen, my lungs, my kidneys, and my brain, before finally admitting they didn't know what was wrong with me.

This was because there was nothing wrong with me: I was just pretending.

But I couldn't tell them that, of course. So I told them I ached here, and ached there, and I screamed a bit and pissed on the floor, and they decided I was probably insane.

According to the nurse, not the pretty nurse but the one who wasn't so pretty, who probably knew I was only pretending but liked me and so kept quiet about it, it was more complicated than that. There was more than one

'they'. There was a school of thought that wanted me to be discharged from the hospital so that I could fly more bombing missions, on the grounds that bombing the hell out of Italian cities was good for brain fever. Another school of thought wanted me locked away, just in case I bombed the hell out of anything I wasn't meant to bomb. A third school of thought didn't give a damn what I bombed or didn't bomb, so long as I didn't do anything to disgrace the USAF, such as pissing myself when a general was visiting the hospital. While these three schools of thought wrote memos to each other about my condition, I was safe, but (the nurse urged) my period of grace was rapidly running out.

When the Doctor presented himself before me in the medicinally scented ward, therefore, my main concern was which school of thought he belonged 150

to and how insane I should pretend to be this time, in order to extend my exemption as long as possible. I examined his face, anxious for clues. I found it to be serious, classical, and well proportioned, his gaze earnest and intense. His eyes had a peculiar quality of fixing on you, as if he were sighting a weapon. He would narrow his focus and talk directly, in an all but incomprehensible manner. However, since I was quite good at that myself, I didn't let it put me off. On the plus side, he wasn't wearing a flight uniform: instead he wrapped himself in a tattered jacket that looked as if it belonged in a fancy-dress party. Nonetheless, even before he spoke, I had a gut feeling that he was trouble, and I was right.

'You're Joseph Heller?'

'No. Abe Lincoln. Heller's in the next bed.' There was no one in the next bed – in fact, there was no next bed, because, warned by the nurse that they were ceasing to take my madness seriously, I'd been screaming so much that they'd evacuated the ward, and wheeled most of the beds out of it to use them somewhere else, probably for the men who'd already had their guts ripped out, instead of those who were

running yellow from the thought that it might happen to them next.

The Doctor glanced at the nonexistent next bed, then he smiled, and spoke softly, gently, sweetly, persuasively, none of which fooled me one bit because the words he said were the four words in the English language that I most dread: 'I need your help.'

I reacted straightaway, in the way that I always reacted to demands for help.

I considered it seriously, then I came to a decision. I got up and began to get dressed. I was wearing a hospital gown, so I shed that. I knew my uniform was being kept in a cupboard at the end of the ward, so I walked there and put on a pair of shorts, socks, a cotton undershirt, a shirt, a jacket, finally my pants. I couldn't find my shoes, but guessed they would be around somewhere. If the worse came to the worst, I could run like hell in my stockinged feet.

As I was doing up my belt, the man spoke up again. 'I'm so glad! I asked for you especially when I heard –'

His words dried up as I turned away from him and ran. I ran very fast, very hard, straight into the arms of a Military Policeman who was guarding the entrance to the ward. I struggled, then didn't struggle, because the guard was bigger and stronger than I was and there was no point.

'This man's mad,' I said, my voice somewhat muffled by the chest pads of the MP's uniform. 'He says he wants my help. I'm mad, you know. That's why I'm in here.'

The MP released me sufficiently to allow me to turn and face the newcomer.

'Are you a colonel?' I asked him.

'No.'

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'A doctor?'

'Sort of. You can call me Doctor if you like.'

'I'd rather not call you anything, if that's all right by you. I'd rather go and lie back in that bed and go right back to sleep,' I said, shrugging

off the now-relaxed grip of the MP and marching back to the bed.

‘But I need your help!’ protested the Doctor, following me. ‘At least think about it.’

‘You haven’t told me what it is you want me to do. And I’m sure it’s bad.

Anyway, I’m mad. Didn’t they tell you?’

‘Yes, but I didn’t believe them.’

This was most definitely a bad sign. I was filled with new longings for escape, but they were likely to be frustrated, so I used my head, or, to be more exact, my mouth. I screamed.

It was a very good scream: long, loud, and yet hoarse from the effort of previous screams of its type. Its timbre and resonance were exceptional. It was also filled with meaning: a deep, frenzied, rough hatred of death, of war, of people who had classical, earnest faces and needed my help, which meant they probably wanted me to kill someone or risk my life, or more likely both at the same time. It was, I hoped, also filled with madness.

Unfortunately, it didn’t fool the Doctor. He just smiled, and gave me a sly look. ‘If you help me you’ll be out of the war.’

‘I’m out of it now.’

His expression darkened. ‘Nobody can stay mad long enough for that.’

‘Quack, quack,’ I told him. ‘Quick, quick, quack, quack, quacketty, quacketty, quick-quick-quack.’ Loosely translated, this meant, ‘Maybe not, but I intend to try.’ However, I didn’t intend to give the Doctor the translation.

He seemed to get it anyway. ‘It won’t work. They know you’re not mad.

You’ve got another week here at best.’

‘Quack, quack, quick-quick, quaaaaawk!’ Which meant, ‘Oh, shit! You’re not telling me they’re going to make me fly again?’

Again the Doctor seemed to get the translation. ‘Yes, they are.’

I decided it was time for outright begging. I leaned forward and

breathed in the Doctor's face. He recoiled a bit, but not far enough for my liking. 'Look, Doctor.' I said. 'I just want to survive this war. I want to be a human being again, not a murderer. I don't want to die –'

'I know. That's why I'm giving you this chance. If you give me what I want, you can go home afterwards. I've arranged it. All you have to do is steal a plane and fly me to Dresden.'

'Quack,' I said. 'Quack, quack, quack, quack, quack, and quack.' Which meant: 'No, no, no, no, no, no, and no.'

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I think he knew that I meant it, because he left. And four days later, true to the Doctor's prediction, I was out of hospital, sitting in the cockpit of a big silver bomber, rolling down the runway with death in front of me. Unfortunately, I wasn't on a mission for the Doctor. That was to come later, when I had been given many more reasons to be desperate.

In the next five months I flew fifteen more bombing missions. I opened the bay doors, bombs fell from my airplane and bricks, organs and bones shattered below. I risked death to spread death, death was everywhere, gore plating my dreams and my waking nightmares. When it got to five days without sleep, I landed my plane without the undercarriage down and broke the rear gunner's legs.

I had become genuinely insane, but after the cunning deception of June they wouldn't believe me. Now, when I should have been in a hospital ward, I was in a prison cell, dank, cold, with the smell of piss and dead rats. That was when the Doctor appeared again, as shadowy and classical as before – prison visiting seems to have been a particular occupation of his around this time.

'Hello Joseph,' he said, smiling gently, 'I think it's you that needs my help now.'

He was persuasive, you could give him that. You could also give him that he was strangely dressed, obsessive, twitchy, and half mad. He was probably a deranged scientist involved in a scheme to test a secret weapon, one that was supposed to bring about a swift and decisive end to the war, but would in fact bring the world to an end. I'd read about weapons like that, in *Amazing*, before the war. Back then, it had been a good story, but wildly improbable.

Now, like many wildly improbable things, it had become the horrible

truth. I didn't want anything to do with it, and I didn't want anything to do with this bright-faced man involving me in his malevolent plans.

Since I was in a prison cell, I couldn't run away: I thought it would be a good idea to spit at him, so I did. The spit landed in a big satisfying gobbet just under his left eye. He jumped back with a surprised expression. I got the idea that he was used to a different sort of response, but it was nice to surprise him. Surprise made his face seem less authoritative, and the gobbet of spit helped. He wiped it away with a large red handkerchief. If he had produced a flight of white doves from it, I wouldn't have been surprised.

Instead he produced a brilliant smile. 'Oh, well,' he said. His English accent was very strong. 'I'll just have to ask the colonel to kill you. He wants to, you know.'

He didn't seem as if he were serious, but, just in case he was, I stood up and hit him. He went away after that, nursing his spit and his new bruise. He looked over his shoulder and winked at me, which I took as a bad sign.

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Chapter Twenty

I've never mentioned the court martial before. It's not the kind of thing you tell to kindly biographers, and a fortunate accident happened to the military records (I wonder how, Doctor). Kurt Vonnegut knows – I told him in one of those alcohol-driven, god-like, literary moments at about 3 a.m. in 1956 – but he'll keep it quiet.

However, since I have no intention of allowing anyone to see this crazy manuscript until I am, as Greene so neatly puts it, 'safely dead', I'll tell you about it now. Just to make the story complete. But, whatever you do, don't breathe a word to anyone in the spirit world: I don't want my afterlife (in the unlikely event I have one) to be plagued by ghostly reporters knocking at my ghostly door. I've had enough of that here and now.

So, on to the court martial. It was a marsupial of the finest nature, big-haunched, pot-bellied, with evil animal eyes and a pouch concealing dark things which could not be mentioned in public. It was held in a Roman room, or perhaps mock-Roman, stony and mosaic-laden, domed as if it had swallowed me. Apart from the two MPs guarding the door, there were four people present: myself; my commanding officer, a long, thin-faced colonel with a slight resemblance to a blood-

drenched praying mantis, who was more than half mad and wanted me dead; the major in charge of the proceedings, who was a man with a brick-red face, a handlebar mustache and a broad Texas drawl, wearing a slightly shabby uniform and a bewildered expression, as if he'd been drafted in at the last moment; and, of course, the Doctor.

The bewildered major read the charge to the Doctor, probably because he was standing in an area of mosaic roped off from the courtroom, perhaps to preserve its archaeological sanctity from the tread of military boots. The Doctor listened solemnly as he was accused of violating standing orders, willfully damaging US Air Force property, cowardice in the face of the enemy, and desertion. He nodded and sighed. 'Guilty on all counts, I'm afraid. But I'm not the prisoner.' He winked and nodded toward me.

The major looked at the mad colonel for guidance. The mad colonel jabbed a finger at me, with hatred on his face. 'That's the one!' he hissed in a stage whisper.

I was trembling a little, and sweating rather a lot, although the high Roman room was cool. I knew that the mad colonel hated me, and wanted 155

me shot. Probably the most serious charge he had on me was nothing to do with crashing the plane. It was that I wanted to write about him. Worse, I wanted to write the truth. Still worse, I was planning to publish this truth in a newspaper. With the benefit of hindsight I can see that I must have been far gone indeed to use the words 'truth' and 'newspaper' in the same sentence, much more so to speak that sentence in the Officers' Mess, where it had been overheard and duly passed on.

Now the mad colonel had me over a barrel. It was a small uncomfortable barrel, rotting in places. It didn't have any beer in it, and it was adrift, barely afloat, in the middle of the Mediterranean, or perhaps the Atlantic. I felt seasick as I stared across the big, dark, damp, winter courtroom at the mad, bewildered men who wanted to kill me.

The Doctor gave his evidence, which was that I'd hit him, but also made a plea for mitigation. 'I need this man,' he said. 'And the world needs him. If you have him shot, you'll regret it.'

The bewildered major was even more bewildered. 'But we weren't going to shoot him!' he said.

The mad colonel glared at him and made a hissing sound. He looked like a praying mantis about to strike.

‘Or perhaps we were,’ finished the bewildered major, going even redder. I began to like him. Despite his evident willingness to kill me, he seemed a decent, honourable man.

‘Look here,’ said the Doctor, ‘I can see that you’re a decent, honourable man, Major. Captain Heller here hasn’t done anything terribly wrong. There isn’t a mark on me –’

‘There’s still the question of Gunner Heedle’s broken legs,’ the mad colonel pointed out.

‘That was an accident,’ said the Doctor. ‘As you both know perfectly well.’

‘No it wasn’t, I did it deliberately.’

The major stared at me.

‘I just didn’t mean to break his legs,’ I added.

‘You deliberately damaged thousands of dollars’ worth of US Air Force property, and compromised the war effort? And you’re *admitting* it?’ asked the bewildered major, evidently more bewildered than he had been up to now.

‘I was mad,’ I said. ‘Or, I should say, I *am* mad. Flying sixty bombing missions has driven me mad. In particular, flying sixty bombing missions against Italians who aren’t even the enemy any more in a war that could have ended at the end of last year, thus forcing me to murder innocent civilians over and over again for no sane reason –’

‘Those views are treasonable, soldier!’ snapped the mad colonel.

‘No,’ I said. ‘They’re mad.’

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‘Treasonable, mad, there’s no difference’ He muttered something in the bewildered major’s ear. It ended in, ‘*now*’ (I heard that part), and was probably,

‘I want him shot, *now*!’

I have to admit that the bewildered major’s real strength of character

shone through at this moment, because his response was that of a true American.

‘But shouldn’t we hold a vote first?’

The mad colonel smiled. ‘Sure. I vote to find Captain Heller guilty.’

The bewildered major fiddled with his fingers for a moment, then muttered something.

‘Sorry,’ said the Doctor politely from his roped-off mosaic. ‘I didn’t catch that.’

‘I abstain,’ muttered the bewildered major.

‘Right! That’s a verdict!’ snapped the colonel. ‘Soldier!’ (This to one of the MPs at the door.) ‘Take this man outside and shoot him!’

He meant it. I could tell, because when the soldier at the door didn’t move he snapped, ‘Come on, man! If you haven’t got the guts for it I’m gonna do it myself!’

His hand was on his gun, and he was fondling it with urgent, masturbatory movements. I felt my knees weaken and my bladder twitch.

‘Hold on a minute.’ It was the Doctor. ‘You haven’t taken my vote yet, nor Captain Heller’s.’

‘Heller doesn’t get a vote!’ The colonel’s face flushed a deep purple. ‘And as for you, you’re not even in the army –’

‘Air Force,’ corrected the major mildly.

‘In fact you’re not even a goddamned American, are you?’

‘Nonetheless I vote to find Captain Heller innocent,’ said the Doctor quietly, stepping over the red rope barrier around the ancient mosaic. He looked at me, and winked. ‘Captain, your vote, please?’

I knew what he was asking. It was the same question he had asked in the hospital ward, and in the prison cell. He wanted my help. Except that now the alternatives were clear: go along with him, or be shot, right now, by the mad colonel.

I did think about it. I thought about it for almost two seconds. Then I decided that, whatever the Doctor wanted, it had to be one better than

being dead.

‘I’ll go along with you, Doctor,’ I said. ‘I vote to find myself innocent.’

‘You can’t,’ said the mad colonel.

‘You can’t,’ echoed the bewildered major, now very bewildered.

The Doctor stepped forward and muttered something to the colonel in a low voice. And no, I didn’t hear it, and no, I don’t know how he did it, except that I guess he appealed to the core of livid self-interest that lay beneath the 157

bloodthirsty surface of the mad colonel. What I do know is that six months later, after six months of a glorious desk job watching my friends fly off to kill people and return in bloody tatters, if at all, and all for no reason, and with my sanity hanging by a thread thinner than one of those bits of cotton they use to hang up the balls on a Christmas tree – after six months of that, on the last day of January 1945, a telegram arrived.

NEED A LIFT TO GERMANY STOP MEET ME AT SPECIFIED AIRBASE
IN

FRANCE STOP SEE GOOD COLONEL FOR FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS

STOP THE DOCTOR ENDS

It was handed to me by the mad colonel himself, while working on a late radio shift in the cold light of a cold office, with a cold view of the cold tarmac outside. I could see a single, silver plane, like a huge, senseless insect, the blind eyes of its cockpit waiting.

The colonel hadn’t lost his resemblance to a praying mantis. He hadn’t lost his bloodthirstiness, or his anger. But he managed a smile, as tense and false as that of a ham actor playing Iago. But never mind.

‘There’s a plane in Bay 3,’ he said, gesturing out the window, as if I had somehow missed it. ‘It’s all fueled up and ready to go. The mission was cancelled – you know how it is, soldier, at the end of the war.’

He paused. I nodded, obediently.

‘You’re not authorized to go anywhere near that plane, soldier. You understand?’

I nodded.

‘In particular, you’re not authorized to fly it to Soissiers Air Base in France.

Any attempt to do this will result in the most serious consequences, you understand? For a breach of discipline of that order we may even have to transfer you away to the continental United States. You’d be out of the war, soldier, if you did something like that. You understand me?’

I understood him. I had been expecting to understand him for six long months. My heart leaped with joy, rather like Turing’s did, but not at the thought of the return of the Doctor to my life. I have to admit it: I didn’t give a damn about that.

But afterwards, I would be going home.

You might think I flew the Doctor into Germany right away after that, but life doesn’t fly in straight lines: it ducks and swerves like a bomber escaping flak. Life with the Doctor is prone to more dodging and ducking than most, as you’ve seen from Turing’s and Greene’s accounts. Turing thinks it’s good, because he’s a boring, unadventurous, stuck-up English prig: Greene thinks it’s 158

bad, because he’s prone to swift, emotional judgments, and therefore judges most things to be bad. I just think it’s dangerous to be in the firing line all the time, and I’m sure everyone would agree with that, without having to make a study of my character.

So, I didn’t fly the Doctor into Germany straightaway. First I ‘stole’ the plane, under the cover of darkness and the watchful eye of the CO I was stealing it from, and flew it to France. Then I hung around for several days, and the Doctor tried to make the crossing by land, an attempt that ended with blood on the snow and three people dead. That was when I got the call at Soissiers and had to fly to another air base near the Swiss border to pick him up, together with three neatly wrapped corpses. We met on the tarmac, sheltering from the wind under a wing of the plane. The metal made the ticking sounds that metal makes as it cools. It was dark: we could have been in any air base, anywhere in the world. There was the same smell of air fuel, the same wind, the same darkness, the same sense of despair engendered by vast machinery used for the purpose of destroying lives.

He told me what had happened, and what was in the small French military truck behind us. I asked him what he wanted to do with the

corpses.

He gave me a dark look. 'I don't know,' he whispered, with guilt written all over his face. 'I'd hoped you would be able to arrange something.'

I told him that my kid sister was good at arranging flowers, but that none of our family had ever had the knack of arranging corpses. To his credit, he didn't laugh. But he didn't offer to do anything about the corpses either.

I asked the Doctor why he thought I would be able to do something about them. 'Why don't you ask the colonel?' I asked. 'He's an expert at hiding stuff that no one wants to see.'

The Doctor jumped. 'Colonel Elgar? He's in Germany, I hope.'

'No, not him. My commanding officer,' I said. The one you made the deal with.' I wondered how many other colonels the Doctor knew, and how many of them looked like praying mantises, and how many of them were mad.

'What makes you think I have any influence with him?'

'One, you were there at the hospital. Two, you were there at the air base.

Three, you were there at the court martial. Four, you had the colonel's permission to blackmail me. Five, it worked and I have stolen a plane for you with my commanding officer's permission. Six –' I'd run out of fingers, but the gist should have been obvious.

The Doctor smiled sweetly. 'I told him I was your friend.' He looked around, then added in a whisper. 'I told him I could stop you making trouble.'

I was appalled at this casual admission of his duplicity. It implied that as well as being duplicitous he was stupid, a fact that would decrease my already 159

slender chances of survival. Suddenly the agreement at the court martial didn't seem like such a good deal. I was going to die anyway.

'I want to go home,' I told the Doctor.

'I understand,' he said. His tone of voice implied that he understood,

and that he wanted me to know that he understood, and furthermore that I would, if I was a right-minded person, think that it was a privilege that I was understood by such a being as the Doctor. It was in this instant that I knew how good my air force training had been, because it had told me how to run and dodge under fire, jump over fences, and even how to navigate in darkness, and these were all skills I was going to need in the next few hours. I turned and walked away into the cold wind, wondering how near to the Swiss border I was, and how long it would take me to walk there.

The Doctor called after me. 'You can't always run away.'

'Why not? You've just told me you've killed three men and you want my help burying the bodies.'

'They were killed by German border guards! The colonel –'

'*Your* colonel.'

'Not *my* colonel. Colonel Elgar, who is nothing to do with me. He told the Germans we were coming, and that we were spies. He rumbled us. It wasn't my fault!'

I turned round, returned to the sheltered space under the wing, and grabbed the Doctor gently but firmly by the throat.

'When people say it isn't their fault,' I told him, 'it usually is. Which means you deserve to be arrested. But since you're not going to be arrested and you're still trying to get me killed, has it occurred to you that if the Germans are on the lookout for you and have got you down as a spy, that you might not live long once you get to Dresden?'

'They won't be expecting me to arrive by parachute.'

'They'll see you arrive by parachute and they'll know you're a spy. Even if Colonel Elgar hasn't tipped them off this time you won't survive an hour.'

'Not if the plane is shot down. That will give us the perfect cover story.'

My grip on the Doctor's throat tightened, and I lost the power of coherent argument. 'No,' I babbled. 'No, no, no, no, no, *no!*'

It made a bit more sense than quacking, but it didn't work any better. I really didn't have any choice. I had stolen an airplane. I could be

shot, with full process of law, without even the mad colonel to try me. So we took off for Dresden within the hour, and within another couple of hours we'd been shot down, and were struggling through the smoke-filled, disintegrating carcass of the plane, hoping to hell we could get far enough clear to use our parachutes.

* * *

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'It wasn't supposed to happen quite like this!' said the Doctor. He didn't seem at all afraid, more amused, as if nothing could possibly happen to him.

Perhaps nothing could. But things could happen to me, many cold, painful and unpleasant things, and looking at the trailing lights of flak in the dark atmosphere below I knew that there was a good chance that they would.

Turing, the plump, ineffective English mathematician who had officially been our navigator for the 'mission', was somewhere far below, falling to his death without a parachute. I yelled at the Doctor to do something, anything, but all I got was another one of those insouciant smiles. Then he jumped off into the empty space below the plane, with a spare parachute in its canvas pack extruding from the end of his arm like the bud of a new human body.

He couldn't possibly save Turing. He couldn't possibly even catch him up.

I jumped after him, through the cold, screaming air, pulled my ripcord and watched the huge, visible, vulnerable canvas of the parachute blossom above me in the crazy flickering light. As I examined it fearfully for signs of impact or burning, the Doctor made a death-defying, life-saving miracle happen a couple of thousand feet below, but I didn't know about this until later. So when I looked down and saw the single parachute zigzag through the flak toward the Elbe, then lost it in the darkness, my head became filled with inaccurate but realistic images of Turing dying, his organs ruptured by the impact with the ground. I thought about his pain and his terror, and I cursed the Doctor, who must be as mad as the mad colonel, and a better and more ruthless liar. I watched the dim buildings of Dresden get closer, and landed easily in a deserted street, surrounded by the smell of air raid.

The Doctor and I had agreed a rendezvous at a restaurant in

Chemnitzstrasse. I had a map, but in the occasional light all I could see were dim strings of road, river and railway that seemed to twitch on the paper like the broken veins of a dead man. I threw away the map, and started to walk at random. It didn't seem to matter much where I went, if I was going to die soon anyway, and that seemed likely.

After about ten minutes, I reached the church. It was the church you've read about already, a dark and gloomy church, with a short spire and the dusty smell of ancients about it, the thick silty accretion of gargoyles and coloured glass carried by European churches, a testament to the centuries of candle grease and worship. There was a dim candlelight within, but the candles were hidden in recesses so that I couldn't see the flames. Gothic shadows danced among the choir stalls and swayed in the nave.

The dance wasn't quite silent: as Greene said, there was a faint susurraton, like huge wings moving slowly. It felt creepy, but less creepy than the mechanical click of a safety catch would have felt.

'Is anyone there?' I whispered.

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A figure rustled out of the shadows, a tall, oddly built figure with a long robe, a long face and a distinctive nose, large and yet graceful. I mistook him for a priest, and took a chance. 'I am American,' I said. 'I have been shot down. I beg the protection of your church.'

It was hypocritical, because I was an atheist then, but I still didn't expect the severity of his reaction. Without altering the grave, calm, priestly expression on his face, he pulled a gun on me. Then he loosed the safety catch.

'No!' shouted the Doctor, which was just in time. When I turned round he was there, his face dark and anxious, and behind him was Turing, very much alive.

It was about then that I decided that I must be dead, and fainted.

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Chapter Twenty-one

Alan Turing was a dull, opportunistic man, intelligent and obtuse, observant and self-centred, kind-hearted and willfully cold. A fleshy

man, he nonetheless minced around, filled with uncertainty about his every gesture, yet he was always certain that his overall outlook on life was all right. It would never occur to him to doubt himself, and it would never occur to him to trust anyone else, though he always believed everything they told him. I was glad he wasn't dead, but I wasn't pleased to see him. I particularly wasn't pleased to see his puffy, obsequious face not far above mine as I regained consciousness, my back cold and my feet warm, the skin of my hands tingling.

'Are you all right now?' he asked, his voice prancing around the question.

'I haven't been all right since 1942,' I told him. 'The war disagrees with my constitution.'

He made a giggling noise.

'It wasn't a joke,' I said. 'Well, not one you're meant to laugh at.'

He examined me a bit more closely. 'Well, it's nearly over,' he said eventually, but without a trace of sympathy. He was just looking for the right words, something to say that sounded right. I began to dislike him intensely.

I sat up, and saw the Doctor looking at me. 'We can't all be perfect,' he commented. Whether he was referring to me or Turing wasn't clear. The Doctor was given to making pronouncements that were both clear and enigmatic, observant, intelligent and useless. He knew what he meant, but communication often wasn't his first priority.

'How come you're still alive?' I asked Turing.

He nodded at the Doctor, who shrugged. 'That was easy. Simple physics, air resistance, gravity. What's more important is that we help our friends here.'

He nodded sidelong at the man who had been about to kill me.

'Friends?' I was prepared to be open-minded on the subject. The man I'd thought was a priest didn't seem interested in me now, and he had put away the gun. He was looking at me with his long, strange face, his eyes unsettlingly clear. Perhaps we could be friends.

'They need to return to the place they came from.' He muttered something else after that, in a frustrated undertone: it may have been, 'So do I. If I only knew where it was!'

I looked around me, and saw a high, arched, stone room. It had to be underneath the church, but it wasn't the shape you'd expect of a crypt. The curves were high and musical, indescribably odd, not quite meeting. Gleam-ing steel was bonded to the stone, flowing with it. Everything was clean, and there was no smell of ancients: instead, the dry scent of dust and cut rock.

This place was new.

'Where is this?'

'I can't tell you,' said the Doctor and Turing together.

The 'priest' was still there, presiding over a communion of curved steel that might have been a musical instrument, the controls of a submarine, or the ribcage of a dead steel monster. He didn't look German, or European, at all: his bones hung wrongly. Yet he didn't seem Asiatic, and certainly not African.

In fact, he didn't seem human, and neither did the place around him. Panic began to wobble in my gut.

He spoke to me, in a low voice that contained undertones, almost musical harmonies. 'We can't tell you where we are going. But we can tell you that if we are not set free, the consequences will be serious for us, and for you.'

'That sounds like a threat to me.' I was trying to be brave, but the wobble was creeping into my voice.

'It's just a statement of the facts, Heller.' The Doctor's voice was impatient.

He was pulling at the lapels of his worn-out jacket as if he were in charge of the situation, though my money was on the guy communing with the submarine controls.

I was about to tell the Doctor what I thought of his facts when he spoke again, in an entirely different tone. 'And it's my fault, too. I should have helped them earlier.'

'I don't care whose fault it is, Doctor, I just want explanations.'

'I've just given you explanations! We have to catch Elgar.'

‘Why? And what about me? I’ve risked my life. So has Turing. Why?’

‘Because we have to.’ His voice was hard again. He added more lightly:

‘You won’t die, Heller. The world has a destiny for you.’

‘How do you know?’

He stamped his foot. ‘I don’t know, and if I did, I might not choose to tell you.’

‘You sound like your friends.’

He nodded. ‘Sometimes too much like them.’

‘You’re from the same place.’ I looked around me again, at the light and music, and wondered if we were in that place already. And, if so, where it was.

‘The thought had occurred to me.’ A pause. ‘But I don’t think so.’ A longer pause. ‘Not quite the same, anyway.’

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The distinction didn’t matter very much to me. ‘So, would you like to tell me what exactly the hell is going on? Where are we? No, no, wait. You haven’t answered my first question. Why is Elgar so important?’

The Doctor ignored me, and paced up and down, his footsteps chiming like church bells, a dark expression on his face. It was very theatrical, but told me nothing.

Turing tried resolutely to fill the gap. ‘As long as Elgar’s around – anywhere –

these people can’t go,’ he explained. ‘He interferes with the encryption appa-ratus.’

‘I’m sorry?’

‘They’re going to encode themselves,’ Turing told me. His face was earnest, excited and innocent. ‘This –’ he waved at the bright room around us – ‘is a quantum resonator.’ He made it sound like a small god. ‘They’ll leave as quantum particles. They’re able to turn matter itself into a code!’

For the first time I noticed that the curved space didn't end where the light-ing ended. The Deco curves of stone and metal receded into a modernist darkness. I could imagine an audience crouched there, a dark, winged audience, indifferent and alien. I felt that little twist of panic in my gut again.

Turing had stopped talking, and was looking at me, eager-eyed, like a first-grader hoping the schoolteacher will see how clever he is.

'Where are we?' I asked him.

He frowned at me. 'Oh! Under the church, of course.'

There was no 'of course' about it, but I didn't argue. 'You're telling me that they're made of equations?' I asked him.

'Well, in a sense we're all made of equations. This flesh –' he pinched his hand – 'is the effect of a wave on a particle. It isn't "solid", except in a theoretical, geometrical sense. Changing the nature of the mathematics that describes my hand would change the nature of its reality –'

I interrupted quickly, before he became completely incomprehensible. 'So the world is just arithmetic made flesh.'

'Yes!'

'And that makes a difference?'

He stared at me. 'Of course it makes a difference! If the world can be explained entirely in terms of mathematics, *and you can alter that description*, then you can do anything you like!'

'So why *can't* we do anything we like? I mean, miraculously make the sky green, wave a hand and be back home, tucked up in bed with a nice warm woman –'

'Well, I don't know how they manage the practical implementation,' he admitted. 'Besides, mathematics has no absolute logical foundation. I'd forgotten.' He looked close to tears.

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I had no idea what he was talking about, but I was sorry I'd made him cry.

'I'm sorry,' I said. 'I didn't mean to upset you, I just wanted to know

why you think that this theory of yours –’

He interrupted. ‘If you can just break life down into a series of simple steps then it can be replicated. Anywhere. By a very simple machine. It doesn’t need to end, you see.’ He looked at me pleadingly.

I saw where the argument was heading. ‘You mean we don’t die, we just get solved?’

He blushed. ‘No – no.’ He was crying now, tears running down his face.

‘You don’t know what happened,’ he whispered.

‘You mean the Germans who died when you tried to cross before?’

He nodded.

‘The Pied Piper over there told me. Wanted me to get rid of the bodies. I think we just left them at the air base in the end.’

Turing leaned forward until he was practically spitting in my face. ‘They were on the plane,’ he whispered. ‘That’s why we had to crash it.’ He put a hand over mine. ‘I had to help him, he didn’t want to tell you.’

I could understand that. I wanted to be angry, but Turing was caught up in his own emotions and didn’t give me the chance. Anyway it was too late to be angry about dead men I didn’t know, hadn’t killed and had never even seen.

‘I just want to – I just want there to be – something –’

I could understand Turing’s feelings, but I ‘just wanted’ to know a bit more about the Doctor’s motives. ‘What exactly did happen when you tried to get into Germany the first time?’ I asked him. ‘And why didn’t the Doctor come straight to me? He’d already arranged it – gone to some trouble.’

Turing’s eyes met mine. ‘The Doctor –’

‘The problem is –’ It was the Doctor’s voice.

Turing and I both jumped, and both turned to look at him, probably with identical caught-out expressions.

‘– Elgar will know them,’ the Doctor went on. ‘And he’ll know me, and

he'll know Turing. So we need someone to arrest him. Someone who he won't dare stand up to. An SS officer will do. We can't get a real one, but we have several uniforms. We thought you might do it.'

I smiled at him. This was idiotic, and it certainly wouldn't work, but at least it was an idiocy that I understood. I felt close to tears with relief.

'I think the large uniform –' the Doctor began.

'Hold on.' Relief was one thing, suicidal behavior another. 'You want me to dress up in an enemy uniform in an enemy city to arrest someone I don't know and hand him over to some very weird people who are probably going to kill him? Is there an alternative deal here?'

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There was a long pause. The Doctor was looking at me, caressing his chin with his hand in a strangely feline gesture.

'All right,' he said. 'You're right. It isn't fair.' He crouched down in front of me. I had propped myself up by now, one elbow on the stone. It was cold and angular, the surface too clean. Close to mine, the Doctor's face, evenly lit from the all sides, seemed to shape-shift, long half-shadows flicking across the flesh. It was creepy, and his words weren't reassuring either.

'Have you ever thought about what's up there?' He gestured at the roof.

'Somewhere normal? A church?'

'And above that?'

'Empty air? USAF bombers?'

He just looked at me. 'And then?'

'Outer space. A vacuum. Emptiness. Very cold. Or is it very hot?'

He shrugged. 'And other worlds?'

I'd known where the argument was going from the start. 'Not God, please, Doctor. God isn't on your side. Any more than he's on ours. In fact I sometimes think God is a great big glutinous monster, sticky-fingered with young men's blood, sitting up there in the sky and laughing at us.'

He didn't recoil, didn't even blink, but an answering sadness darkened all the shadows on his face.

'Sometimes I think that too,' he said. Then his voice resumed its normal briskness. 'But that's not what I'm talking about. What is, literally, above the sky?'

I thought for a moment, then said, 'You're trying to tell me you're from Mars, or something? I think I'd prefer the band of fallen angels.'

'Prefer whichever you like. Another world, real or metaphorical. The point is, they have to go back there.'

'You've told me that already. You haven't told me how, or why, or why I should be fighting on their side.'

'Why do you fight on the American side?'

'Because I'm American, and there's this thing called the draft, in case you haven't read about it. I don't get any choice.'

'So you're just a machine, obeying an instruction set?'

It took me a moment to work out that by 'instruction set' he just meant

'orders'. His language was odd like that, full of phrases that weren't quite right, didn't quite make sense, until you thought about them.

I denied that I was a machine. 'I'm a human being!' I told him. 'Why do you think I went mad? Why do you think I crash-landed my plane and broke a healthy young man's legs? Because I can't obey an "instruction set"!'

Because I'm an American who doesn't want to kill Italians and Germans and Frenchmen and Romanians and Russians just because they happen to be on 167

the wrong side, or living on the wrong side. The people we bomb are innocent – and we rip their guts out! How do you think I feel about that?'

The Doctor nodded thoughtfully, and muttered, 'You'll do.'

I was so relieved at having passed the test, and at having been able to speak what I thought without its having been denied, that I completely forgot that I hadn't been trying to be accepted. By the time

I remembered, it seemed to be too late to say no.

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Chapter Twenty-two

In the next three days more things were explained to me. None of them were any use. I learned that you could question the Doctor's decisions at any time, but it would always turn out that you'd made a mistake. I learned that he had an 'affinity' with the strangers – Turing's description – and that his reasons for being with them in Dresden had more to do with that affinity, and a kind of pathological curiosity, than any particular desire to help them. I learned that Turing was in love with the Doctor, an excited, hopeless, sexual yet nonsexual, adoring, stupid, profound love that had turned his whole life upside down.

'Do you think he feels anything for me?' asked Turing.

'I'm sorry?' We were sitting at a table in that restaurant on Chemnitzstrasse, eating the vinegar-coated cabbage. It was making me feel slightly sick. We spoke quietly, so that no one would notice the alien English language. The Doctor was on a stool by the only window that wasn't broken and boarded up, staring at the passers-by like a cat examining passing birds. Perhaps he was watching out for Elgar. He hadn't said he was, but we visited this restaurant every day, and the Doctor always looked out the window, so Turing and I had drawn our own conclusions. We knew it couldn't be the cabbage.

The strangers weren't with us. They never came out, but remained encrypted in the steel-and-stone chamber that they'd hacked out from the damp catacombs under the church, no doubt doing whatever it is that fallen angels from the cold heavens above us do when they're not pretending to be human.

'The Doctor. Do you think he has any human feelings?' Turing's face was earnest, excited, and innocent. A piece of limp cabbage adhered to his upper lip. His tongue kept flicking out, trying to move it, failing, then making a new attempt. Turing was, probably, oblivious to the process. I stared, fascinated, while he elaborated: 'If he has human feelings then he might – do you think he might? – take me with him.'

I frowned. 'Where to? He doesn't even know where he lives. Whether it's Outer Space or the Inner Circle of Hell. And do you really want to live in either?'

Yet again he didn't catch the irony. 'I don't know. It might be better than here.'

I noticed that the cabbage was gone from his lip. 'Better than a stinking restaurant in a defeated country which might be bombed to hell and back any 169

night? Perhaps. But better than home? Warm fire, logs, thatched cottage, whatever you English have.'

Turing smiled. 'A dream, I think.'

I knew it was. But I still had hope, back then.

'Hey! You two!' The Doctor's voice, from the window. He came over to the table and put a guiding hand on Turing's arm, spoke in a stage whisper.

'They're coming! Alan – you and I need to disappear. Heller – watch them!'

Turing got up and he and the Doctor pushed their way through a heavy, dark-paneled wooden door into the dull steam of the kitchens. I heard a rapid, angry conversation in German at the same time as Greene and Colonel Elgar walked in through the front.

I recognized them from the Doctor's description. Greene was a heavy, cantankerous man, ugly-featured and peak-browed. He looked anxious and confident, self-satisfied, sensitive and cruel. Elgar looked like a wax dummy: the curve of his thinly cropped head, the glass of his eye, the set and carriage of his body under the German uniform, were too perfect to be real. He was a machine on the march, a digest of everything that wasn't human. They didn't talk very much, and what little they said was in German. I waited while they waited, watched them watching, trying not to be too obvious, trying to be a good spy. After about half an hour I tired of sitting there under the suspicious gaze of the German waiters and shuffled out, hoping I wouldn't be asked anything by the very large doorman, who had argued with Elgar and Greene on their way in. He breathed sour breath on me but didn't speak.

In the street I waited some more, feeling colder and colder. For lack of anyone else to talk to, I talked to an iron lamppost that stood on the other side of the street from the restaurant. Perhaps, I told the lamppost, shivering, an Italian posting hadn't been so bad after all. I propounded a racial theory to it, worthy of the Nazis: perhaps one of

the reasons the Germans were the bad-tempered villains they were reputed to be was the cold, gray hardness of their winter days. The easy-going Italians too were molded by their climate.

Their whores were soft and supple: German whores, I imagined, would be hard and angular, full of turning-on and putting-off devices.

..

At last Greene and Elgar left the restaurant, and I followed them to and fro along Chemnitzstrasse until they selected somewhere to stay. Then I returned to the church, dressed in one of the strangers' purloined SS uniforms, and went out again in the middle of the night and arrested Greene and Elgar at the Cohns' house. The rest is history, you've read it already, but, like most history, it's incomplete, and written by the people who happened to be alive at the end of it.

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I don't know whether Mrs Cohn died. I didn't even know she was there.

Greene never told me.

Three hours later, I was standing in the church and waiting for my good ol'

American colleagues in G Wing to drop their bombs on me and blow the whole crazy situation to hell. I'd already sat through a half-hour of Greene, the Doctor and Turing discussing the moralities and possibilities. They were very good at discussion, I'd decided, and much less good at action. The strangers remained silent and slightly threatening, their mysteries unexplained. The only plan of action I'd heard was a complex, mathematical, incomprehensible double-brained lecture from Turing and the Doctor, the gist of which was that the shock waves from the exploding bombs would interfere with the interference from Elgar that was stopping the strangers going wherever they wanted to go – which was why we were going to leave Elgar in the crypt when the bombs went off. The lower the better, apparently. The Doctor didn't want to kill him, if he could help it. What was happening to the Art Deco submarine-like chamber in its space beneath the crypt, and what the strangers were going to do, exactly, hadn't been too clear.

I'd heard the air-raided sirens first – I was attuned to them, I guess. For the first time, I wished I was in one of the bombers. It seemed a hell of a lot more dangerous down here.

We went outside – Turing and Greene first, the Doctor and I following, the strangers getting from one location to another in that flowing, silent, unnoticeable way of theirs. The raid was well under way, flame-light brighter than moonlight and infinitely more bloody. The church building squatted above us, its solid stone seeming to dance in the growing firelight. It was obscene, alien, a huge spider waiting to gobble us up, yet the Doctor didn't seem afraid of it. He was arguing with Greene, their bodies bobbing vehemently like two insects in a mating dance. Fragments of dialog drifted over to me: more philosophy, morality, consciousness. I looked at my three dark, tall companions.

They looked less incongruous in SS uniforms than they had in priestly robes.

The military ironmongery suited them, glinting in the bomb light: it made them seem unreal, which they probably were. They looked back with sorrow in their eyes. Or perhaps it was just an effect of the light.

Then the church exploded, windows cascading outward in a thick spray of fire, and Greene bolted in, right into the centre of it, with one of the strangers in pursuit with a gun. That was the one with the roofing slate buried in his shoulder. The sight of him moving forward with what should have been a fatal injury, the gun still in his hand, scared me as much as it scared Greene.

The Doctor screamed after the stranger, 'Don't kill him!' and he didn't; but that wasn't quite enough to reassure me.

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A moment later the Doctor was next to me, pressing a hard, cold piece of metal into my hand. 'If Elgar gets out we'll have to disable him,' he said.

And as you will know, Greene got Elgar out, and, as you will have guessed, I lifted the cold, hard piece of metal, and watched Elgar start to scream. The Doctor caught him from the other side. The strangers joined in. Elgar's arm began to burn. I knew straightaway that the Doctor had lied to me. We weren't disabling Elgar: we were killing him. *I* was killing him. I was standing there, killing an intelligent being, on the say-so of people I didn't understand and didn't entirely trust. It was just like being in the US Air Force.

Then Greene came out of the church and started waving his revolver around as if it were the business end of a hose. I've never been so

relieved to see a man. I didn't want to kill anybody, and now I had every excuse to dive for cover, which is what I did, bruising my cheek on the rough ground that was already starting to feel hot. When I looked up, the Doctor was down and Greene was running away. For some reason it was Turing – the only one of us who was unarmed – who set off in pursuit. All three – the burning Elgar, the frightened Greene, the bizarre Turing – vanished into the relative darkness of the street.

'There's still a chance!' snapped the Doctor, rolling upright with remarkable rapidity for a man who'd just been shot. I couldn't see any blood, and concluded he'd been playing possum. A quick thinker, obviously. And used to being shot at, which told me quite a lot about him. 'Quick!' he snapped. 'Into the crypt! We'll use the chamber!'

I followed them. Others might have been curious about the science and mathematics of it, or the beauty of it, or might've wanted to find out the truth after all the excitement. I just wanted to stay alive. The crypt was deep. I knew a lot about what high-explosive bombs could do to you, and there were a lot of them falling all around us.

Nothing happened.

I didn't know what was supposed to have happened, but I could tell from the Doctor's grim-faced determination that something was wrong. The Deco curves of the construct hadn't glittered, hummed, bent, or done whatever they were supposed to do. The strangers were still there, as sorrowful and robed as before.

'Elgar's still here,' said the Doctor. 'And he's still blocking the signal.'

'So you're going to have to kill him?' I said, after a decent interval.

'Yes.'

There was a long silence, followed by an irregular chiming sound, like an out-of-order carriage clock. I counted the chimes: when the count reached thirteen I realized that it was someone knocking at the door. One of the 172

strangers walked into the darkness around the entrance – he looked as if he were walking down, though I knew the floor sloped up toward that way.

Geometry was strange in the strangers' excavation.

I heard Turing's voice. 'He's with Elgar.' The voice echoed in the long stone-and-metal cavern: ' -gar -gar -gar'. 'He's not dead (-ed -ed -ed).'

The Doctor and I looked at one another. 'We're going to have to catch him.'

'I'm not going to help this time. I don't like killing people.'

His eyes held mine, hypnotic. 'We'll see.'

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Chapter Twenty-three

'We'll have to find a dead body.'

He seemed to be talking to the strangers this time, which was just as well.

They didn't say much, but the tallest one, the one who had been injured while pursuing Greene into the church and who still had a foot-long roofing slate protruding impossibly from his shoulder, started off toward the flames. I shuddered. With Dresden burning around us, it seemed unlikely there would be a shortage.

We were approaching the river. There had been no way to follow Turing's directions to the cellar: the whole street was on fire. Even getting to the river was hazardous. The city was a bonfire, white-flamed buildings crumbling like Christmas cake. In the intervals between the roar of flames and falling masonry – particularly as we neared the river, where there was more space –

I could hear the scream of overloaded engines. I could even smell aviation fuel. The panicky young men of G Wing were above me, destroying a city and being destroyed. I knew the feeling.

The tall stranger returned, the slate replaced by a drooping corpse wrapped around his neck like a muff, like one of those dead foxes favoured by a certain kind of society woman before the war, the eyes still wide and staring, as this man's were. I vomited.

'Good!' said the Doctor cheerfully. 'With a blanket around the head he'll look as good as new.'

'All it needs is your clothes.' This was Turing. Wiping my face on my sleeve, I eyed him with cold horror, but it did no good. The horror of

it had started to pass him by. I knew the sort of man. They busied themselves with the instrumentation of life, with charting a course and reaching a destination.

Dead bodies were incidental.

It was the Doctor who demurred. ‘This jacket’s been with me a long, long, time,’ he said. ‘Since before I can remember.’

‘If you don’t do it,’ I said, ‘one or the other of them will kill you.’

The Doctor admitted that this might inconvenience him a little, and agreed to part with the jacket.

Ashamed of having spoken and joined in the tacit conspiracy of killing, I hung back as we carried on along a wind-lashed street – poor cottages, windows broken and walls blackened, but intact. At the end there was water, 175

a canal with a towpath. We walked along it, far too near to a burning factory building on the other side. Flames shot up from charred brickwork and exploded panes of glass. A chimney hung perilously in the midst of the fire, waiting to fall. It seemed to be swaying. I could feel the heat.

‘There!’

I could see Greene then. Elgar was with him. They were standing on a sort of jetty, set into a brick tunnel under the burning factory. I don’t think they realized the danger. Several people were shouting at them from our side, but they weren’t taking any notice.

Greene, however, saw when the strangers advanced and dumped the Doctor’s faked corpse in the canal. The Doctor and I hung back with Turing, keeping to the shadow of a frayed tree. I was pretty sure he couldn’t see us, let alone recognize the man he thought he’d killed. He looked stricken, as if it had worked.

‘A boat!’ said the Doctor suddenly.

I could see the boat, a wooden cockroach of a thing with two oars, tied to a stanchion by a frayed cable.

‘It will need two of us,’ gabbled the Doctor. ‘Alan – give me your coat! And Heller – take your uniform jacket off. He hasn’t seen you except at the arrest so he won’t recognize you straightaway.’

I stamped my foot on to the hard stone of the wharf. 'I'm not getting involved.'

The Doctor was shuffling his way into Turing's jacket.

'I don't even know which side is which,' I pointed out. 'How do we know your friends are the good guys?'

The Doctor grabbed my shoulders and treated me to another of his hypnotic stares. 'I know,' he said. 'Believe me, I know.'

'Why should I believe you?' But I did believe. There was no rationality to it: I had faith. It was a choice. I could let Elgar slip, risk allowing him to kill the Doctor and the strangers, and quite possibly me, and then – who knew?

Or I could help the Doctor to kill him.

I removed my uniform jacket, and stepped out of the shadows, down the worn steps that led to the rowboat. The Doctor handed me that cold, cold piece of metal, and we set off for the other side.

I hoped Elgar wouldn't get on the boat, but he did.

I hoped Greene would push us into the water when I drew the weapon, but he didn't notice it at first, because he was staring down the canal where the body he thought was the Doctor had floated away. Suddenly Elgar turned, and I saw he was blind.

The Doctor made a movement with his hand, and the flames started.

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Last time I could argue that I'd been tricked. It had been the Doctor doing the killing. Now I knew what I was doing. Now it was murder. I watched as the flesh fell away and the ululating screams choked off. I watched the eyes as they melted and knew that there was no difference between this thing and a man.

I heard the Doctor shouting, felt a hand tug my arm, pushing me off balance and over the side. I fell into the cold murky water. For one glorious minute, as I struggled to right myself and catch my breath, I thought that the Doctor had saved me from this execution. Then I saw the Viking pyre that the rowboat had become, the melted remains of Elgar sinking into hissing water, and realized he had merely saved my life.

I dipped down, deep, deep, and tried to drown myself, but he saved me again, the bastard.

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Chapter Twenty-four

It took us an hour to get back to the church. The city was still burning in the distance. The nearer streets were simply charred, as if the Christmas cake had been left in the oven too long. Embers flew like small meteors, and the air smelled of charcoal. We all coughed a lot, even the strangers. There were bodies around, obscene charred things. We tried hard not to look at them, and all failed, I think.

Greene, the Doctor, and I, who had all taken a dip, slowly dried out in the heat. I couldn't look at Greene: shame choked me. I'm not sure why he walked with us. Perhaps there was nowhere else to go.

Turing sidled up to me. 'Do you think the Doctor is human?' he asked.

I stared at him. 'Why does it matter?'

Turing stared back, amazed. 'It matters to him.' He frowned. 'You see, if he's human then –'

'I've just killed someone, Turing.'

He patted my shoulder! 'I know, I know. That's what I mean. Look, I have this theory. If you can't tell the difference between an intelligent machine and a human being, then the machine must be human. Yes?'

'So, I've just killed someone. In cold blood. On the Doctor's say-so.'

'But if you can tell the difference, then it isn't human. Now, can you tell the difference?'

I remembered Elgar's eyes, melting.

'No,' I said.

'Ah. I see.' And he trotted off toward Greene. I suspect he asked the same question, because Greene just laughed. Then he sobered up, and I heard him say, 'You know nothing about love, Turing.'

'I do! I love –' Turing didn't say it, but glanced in the Doctor's direction.

‘And I *did* love,’ said Greene. ‘I loved her, and he tricked me into killing her.’

Turing went on to talk to one of the strangers, perhaps asking the same question. I sidled up to Greene.

‘Who did you kill?’ I asked quietly.

‘Does it matter?’ he said, disgusted.

I found myself telling him about the bombing missions. He watched me, his face alert, and nodded from time to time.

‘You didn’t love them, though,’ he said at the end.

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‘Who?’

‘The people you’ve killed. You didn’t love them. Didn’t know them.’

I wanted to say it didn’t make any difference, but I knew it did. We were walking through an avenue of corpses, through the stinking remains of a char-nel house, and it was only Elgar’s death that mattered to me, because I had been responsible.

‘Who *did* you kill?’ I asked Greene again. But he didn’t answer. I found out only when I read his story, in this manuscript.

At last we were back at the church. The windows were gone, and the smell inside was even more appalling than that outside, but it was possible to get into the crypt, and through the trapdoor at the bottom of the crypt into the strangers’ light-and-music chamber.

We assembled, the Doctor, Turing, Greene, and I, and then we noticed the strangers were gone. There had been no light, no music, no heavenly surge of power or the screaming of engines. They were, clearly and simply, gone. And the Doctor was, clearly and simply, still there.

He crumpled slowly, like a flower without water. ‘They left me behind,’ he muttered.

I knew then that this had been the Doctor’s sole motive all along. He had wanted to get away: I’d known it from the beginning. As I’ve said, all I hadn’t realized was just how far he’d wanted to go.

‘They left me behind!’ shrieked the Doctor.

I felt the gut-kick of anger, a terrible, avenging anger. I’d killed Elgar, was still risking my own life, because of this man’s ego. He had believed himself to be a god, or at least someone who belonged above the sky – and, God help me, I’d believed in him. Now, in one of those searing flashes that precede death, either physical or moral, I saw that he’d had no more idea which side had been right than I had.

I could tell that he was working that out too. He was looking around like a man who realizes that the prison cell is still there, that he was only dreaming of green fields and yellow, buttery sunsets.

‘What am I going to do?’ he asked, still curled up like a defeated child, apparently addressing his boots.

‘Never mind,’ said Turing. ‘Things will get better here.’

Greene snorted. Turing looked daggers at him, and put his arm around his beloved. ‘The machines I’m building will think like people. Now I know that it can be done nothing will stop me. In fifty years’ time – a hundred – by then they’ll work alongside humans – with them. It might even be possible to integrate computers with the mind itself! And they’ll talk to each other by radio – anyone speaking to anyone, anywhere – just imagine it! And all 180

the information – we’ll break all the codes, all the barriers and we’ll know everything – there won’t be any more hatred or misunderstanding or war.’

It must have been a wonderful moment for him, as he unwrapped his promises like a list of Christmas presents for a kid. Then the Doctor spoiled it.

He uncurled himself and looked up.

‘No you won’t,’ he said, his voice a hollow whisper. ‘I think I’ve been there.

I can almost remember –’

‘I think it’s better to be human,’ commented Greene, getting the discussion back on to his railroad track just when it was getting interesting. ‘I’ve never wanted to be God.’

‘Never?’ asked Turing. ‘Oh, no, Graham. I’ve read your novels. You

might not want to be God but you enjoy speaking on his behalf.'

'And you don't?' sneered Greene. 'The great mathematician? The all-important man to the war effort? The man who's going to build the future?'

Don't tell me there haven't been moments when you've felt as if the secrets of the universe were yours to command.'

Turing flinched, like a child about to be punched, then stuttered, 'S-s-o what? I don't tell other people how to live!'

'Stop it, you two!' bawled the Doctor. 'They've gone, don't you understand that? There never were any gods, just strangers in robes who wanted something. And we killed someone – I killed a man –'

'You said he wasn't a man!' yelled Turing.

Greene and I looked at each other. For Turing of all people to worry about whether what we'd killed was 'truly human' when it was *obvious*

–

But neither of us said anything. It wasn't worth it.

The Doctor walked up to me, put his hands on my shoulders lightly. There were tears on his cheeks.

'I've killed so many people,' he whispered.

I nodded, because I had killed people too. Long before he had made me kill Elgar. And I had seen their bodies all around me, in the burning streets of Dresden, in the corpse we had dressed in the Doctor's clothes and sent on its way.

'But never like this,' the Doctor went on. 'Never without a cause.' His nose was running, too. 'I just wanted to escape –'

I knew that feeling, too. 'There are never any causes good enough,' I said.

It was dumb comfort. The words meant nothing to him. They didn't mean that much to me.

There was a long silence like that, the Doctor with his arms on my shoulders, Turing looking at us with a slight frown on his face, Greene with his hands in his pockets, looking up.

Then Greene said, 'Have you noticed something?' He gestured at the ceiling.

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I looked and saw that the Deco curves of metal and stone had gone. There was just damp stone, crudely arched – quite a small chamber, lit by a single beam from the doorway. An electric flashlight, I realized: Turing must have been carrying it.

'It was a projection!' exclaimed Turing. 'They must have a means of controlling matter and energy! Or perhaps just light –' He began playing with his hands, as if counting on his fingers.

'That's not the point,' said Greene.

Our eyes met. 'The point is,' I said, 'we're in a damp hole under a burning city in an enemy country. How the hell do we get home?'

'That's not the point either.' Greene began to move, restlessly. The Doctor turned to look at him.

'The point is –' the Doctor began.

Greene nodded.

The Doctor rubbed his hands together. 'The point is, it's time for the killing to stop. There's nothing any of us can do about what we have done. We can't bring the dead back to life. They're gone – and they had to go. Whatever you think of me, whatever I think of myself, there wasn't any doubt about that.'

Greene and I exchanged another glance. Both of us felt, I think, that he was talking about something 'bigger' than the immediate affair. Neither of us felt inclined to ask what it was, because we already knew the answer: he had forgotten, he was forgetting, he was determined to forget.

As if in confirmation of this, the Doctor rubbed his hands together briskly, and that insouciant smile lit up his face. 'But we're here,' he said. 'We're four fit, able-bodied men, and there are people up there who are injured and dying and in need of our help.' He started toward the door, in his ordinary, water-soiled clothes, his feet clicking on the ordinary stone. 'Come on!'

Turing scurried after him. Greene and I followed.

‘Do you think you’ll ever want to speak for God, Mr Heller?’ Greene muttered as he passed.

‘I don’t think so.’

‘Don’t be so sure. You sound like the type.’ He winked.

The Doctor led us up, into the fire that was not the fire of salvation but the sort that burns, with smoke and hurt and tortured bodies and death. He walked arm in arm with Turing, and they talked, probably about miracles and the mysteries of the universe, but I couldn’t hear them any more. And anyway, it was probably all in code.

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About the Authors

Turing, Alan Mathison (1912–54) English mathematician and computer pio-neer, born in London. He made important contributions to the philosophy of mathematics, particularly through his paper, ‘Computable Numbers’, published in 1936. He devised the original concept for a ‘universal machine’.

He made important contributions to the design and programming of early electronic computers. He derived a test, known as ‘the Turing Test’, which enables an operator to decide whether a computing machine is the equivalent of a human – basically, he requires that there be no distinction between the replies of the computer and the replies of the human. Later commentators have pointed out that this test is an ideal: a perfect theory, but impossible to put into practice. How long would you have to talk, before you were sure?

Turing committed suicide at Wilmslow, Cheshire. Nobody knows why.

Greene, (Henry) Graham (1904–91) English novelist, born in Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire. He converted from Anglicanism to Catholicism in 1926. His major novels, notably *The Power and the Glory* (1940), *The End of the Affair* (1951), and *A Burnt-Out Case* (1961), deal with religious issues. He also wrote several plays, film scripts (notably, *The Third Man*, 1950), short stories and essays, as well as three volumes of autobiography. His role as a spymaster in World War Two, during which he was for some of the time under the direction of the traitor Kim Philby, has contributed a great deal to the authenticity of his spy fiction.

Heller, Joseph (1923–99) US novelist, born in New York City. He

served with the US Air Force in World War Two, and his wartime experience forms the background for his famous antiwar novel, *Catch-22* (1961), which describes the evils of war using an unrelenting black irony. In later life he became, reputedly, a near-recluse, but in fact maintained a wide circle of personal and literary friends – he just didn't like the press very much.

Smith, Dr John X (editor) (???? –????). A wanderer and philosopher, lost in the twentieth century of a human civilisation that he doesn't think is his any more, because two hearts beat in his chest, and two minds run in his brain, or maybe more than two, stretching away into a very strange distance. Lacking 183

memory of his past, he possesses nonetheless self-knowledge, and a terrible understanding of the world which, sometimes, he just can't bear. He is waiting for the year 2001, which is when something new is going to happen to him, according to the piece of faded paper he has carried for more years than he remembers. He hopes he will be ready.

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About the (other) Author

Paul Leonard lives in St George, Bristol, with his partner Eve, three cats and many many plants. He has recently discovered that there is a life that doesn't involve sitting in front of a computer making up things, but he isn't quite sure whether this new sensation is for real yet. Further news will follow, perhaps.

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The Second World War is drawing to a close. Alan Turing, the code-breaker who has been critical to the allied war effort, is called in to break a mysterious new cypher. It's coming from Germany, and everyone assumes it is German – everyone except Turing's new friend, the Doctor. Indeed it seems the Doctor knows too much about the code, and the code-makers – and when people start to die, even Turing wonders if the Doctor is the one to blame.

Graham Greene, novelist and spymaster, has also encountered the Doctor, and thinks he's a rum enough chap, but in a remote African village he has encountered something far stranger.

To find out the truth, they must all cross the front line and travel through occupied Germany – right into the firing line of the bloodiest war in history. What they find there has no human explanation – and only the Doctor has the answers. Or maybe they're just more questions...

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